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George Post

A CALIFORNIA WATERCOLORIST

With an Introduction by
Rex Brandt

An Interview Conducted by
Ruth Teiser
in 1983

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George Post at his 78th birthday party, Galerie de Blanche Restaurant, San Francisco, where he was presented with his completed oral history, September 29, 1984.

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Regional Oral History Office
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University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name GEORGE POST

Date of birth SEPT. 29. '06 Place of birth OAKLAND, CAL.

Father's full name GEORGE B. ROOT JR.

Birthplace SAN FRANCISCO, CA.

Occupation ACCOUNTANT

Mother's full name RUTH GODFREY

Birthplace SANTA MONICA, CA.

Occupation HOUSEWIFE

Where did you grow up ? OAKLAND, CA. & VIRGINIA CITY, NEV.

Present community SAN FRANCISCO

Education GRAMMAR SCHOOL (GRATTAN), HIGH SCHOOL (POLYTECHNIC HI)
ART SCHOOL (CALIF SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS)

Occupation(s) TEACHER AND ARTIST

Special interests or activities PAINTING, TRAVELLING
AND CONDUCTING PAINTING WORKSHOPS.

GEORGE POST

1936

Photograph by Sonya Noskoviak

INTRODUCTION

I had come over to San Francisco from Berkeley to visit Tom Lewis, another Southern California artist who had preceded me by a year, arriving in the Bay area in 1933. In the course of our conversation I mentioned how much I admired the watercolor landscapes of George Post. Tom said, "Why don't you tell him that, he lives next door!" A few steps along the narrow, high-ceilinged hallway of the old brick loft building on Montgomery Street; a hesitant knock on a studio door; a friendship of fifty years began.

Post was already recognized in the San Francisco area as a painter of lucid, forceful watercolors. Geometrically firm yet sensitive, employing smokey earth colors and areas of untouched white paper, they were unique. Their subjects responded to the artist's homeland--San Francisco, the Bay, and the Mother Lode--with great perception and feeling. Shortly, these works were to receive national attention and to assure George Post's position in the world of American landscape painting.

To get there is one thing; but how to survive for half a century is another. California seems to devour young artists. Its cultural diversity and cult of change are unrivaled and have contributed to the rapid rise and fall of many bright young painters--but not Post.

I think that the secret of George Post's success both as a painter and as a teacher of painting is inherent in the cohesiveness of his personality. He even looks like his paintings, and they look like him! Angular yet graceful, simple yet powerful, positive yet critical. There is no dichotomy. What you see is what you get--a loving involvement with the world, focused sharply by the disciplines of paint and white paper. As with the poet Robinson Jeffers, the artist's life and his work are one.

The direct involvement with his subject is unique, especially today when we find so many painters turned back by the camera and the need for novelty, ratiocinating within the four walls of the studio, insulated from the world we share. Not so Post. Rain or shine, on the fog-draped Mendocino coast, in the summer heat of his ranch at Sonora, on the windy streets of his beloved San Francisco--or of Calcutta, Hong Kong, or Paris--he paints *en plein air*.

With an innocent eye and firm hand, perched on a tiny stool, drawing board propped on the earth at his toes, he and his subject are inseparable. The act of painting is a direct communion. Creating this way is neither easy nor typical. (The Oriental masters, for example, eschewed direct painting.) But when it can be accomplished it is extraordinarily successful. Witness Turner, Cezanne, the Impressionists, Winslow Homer, John Marin, *and* George Post!

When the artist first displayed his watercolors, the medium was not considered seriously as a painting form. Watercolor *drawings* were lumped with prints and other graphics, and relegated to the collector's cabinet. Now they are "out of the closet" and gracing many walls, thanks to a handful of American painters and their abilities and persistence. Not the least of this group were the Californians whose brash, bold, and decorative paeans to the Western outdoors captivated the art world of the forties through the sixties. Loosely affiliated as members of the California Water Color Society, they and their works became known to a wide audience through the annual exhibitions and the traveling exhibits which ensued.

Among the names most frequently appearing in the reviews of this group are Southern Californians Phil Dike, Millard Sheets, and Barse Miller; and, from the Bay area, Dong Kingman, Maurice Logan, Tom E. Lewis, and George Post.

This group along with some other members was invited to exhibit at New York's Riverside Museum in 1936. Although the Museum is a distance up the Hudson, turnout was unexpectedly large and enthusiastic. Critics supplied rave reviews. The Metropolitan Museum acquired several works for its permanent collection, including one by Post. And the Society was invited to exhibit again, and then a third time. Watercolor, especially the fresh California viewpoint, was *in*. George Post was on his way to the large and admiring audience he now enjoys.

Not only the paintings but the painter himself have reached out beyond the edges of the Pacific. As a teacher of painting, Post is examplar and ubiquitous; classes on the West Coast, East Coast, in Europe, Mexico, Hawaii, attest to his success and have created a large and loyal following of friends, students, and fellow artists.

I am happy to include myself among this group, and am honored to be invited to write about this unique individual on behalf of all of us.

Rex Brandt

1 July 1984
High Tor
Shaw Island, Washington

INTERVIEW HISTORY

George Post is a man characterized by the kind of independence and restlessness that seem to belong to the American West, an artist who, throughout his long career, has taken his own way. His watercolors (all distinctly his own, eloquently characterized by Rex Brandt in his Introduction), together with the classes he has taught and the lectures he has given, have influenced many whose professions lie in the arts. To others whose interest in painting is avocational he has brought understanding and pleasure.

George Post, Catherine Harroun, Elvin Fowler, and the interviewer have been friends for many years, and this interview began as an informal taping of some of Post's recollections that the three of us had heard from time to time. Only after it was underway was an effort made to impose order, by chronology and subject matter. Some further rearrangement was done during the editing of the transcript by the interviewer.

The six interview sessions were held in the spring of 1983 in San Francisco at the studio where Catherine Harroun and Ruth Teiser have worked, and at the home of Catherine Harroun, who participated in the initial sessions. Elvin Fowler attended the final session and added details of some incidents he had witnessed and participated in. After the transcript had been edited by the interviewer, both Elvin Fowler and George Post read it over and checked dates and names and other matters, and the latter made a number of additions of interest.

A brief interview with George Post, conducted at the Oakland Museum for the Archives of American Art in 1964, focusing upon his participation in the Federal Art Project (WPA) in 1936 and 1937, is of additional interest. A tape and typed transcript are at the Archives, a department of the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C.

A copy of a tape cassette, the soundtrack of a slide presentation made and copyrighted by George Post in 1977 under the title "Watercolor Simplified," has been deposited in The Bancroft Library.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer-Editor

6 September 1984
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

POST, GEORGE (BOOTH)
PAINTER
b Oakland, Calif, Sept 29, 06. *Study:* Calif Sch Fine Arts. *Work:* San Francisco Mus Art; Seattle Art Mus; Calif Palace of Legion of Honor; San Diego Fine Arts Soc; Metrop Mus Art; and many others. *Exhib:* Metrop Mus Art; San Francisco Mus Art; DeYoung Mem Mus; Seattle Art Mus; San Diego Fine Arts Gallery; and others. *Teaching:* Instr, Stanford Univ, 40; prof fine arts, Calif Col Arts & Crafts, 47-73; instr, San Jose Col, 51-52; class workshops conducted in Spain, 74, Oaxaca & Taxco, Mex, 75, Albuquerque, NMex, 75, 76 & 77, Salt Lake City, Utah, 76, Aspen, Colo, 76, Sorrento, 76, Little Rock, Ark, 77 & San Miguel, Mex, 78. *Awards:* Purchase Awards, Watercolor USA, Springfield Mus Art, Mo, 66 & Jack London Square Art Festival, 68; First Award, Zellerbach Show, 75; and others. *Mem:* Am Watercolor Soc; San Francisco Art Asn; Calif Nat Watercolor Soc; Int Inst Arts & Lett; Southwest Watercolor Soc. *Publ:* Contribr illus in Fortune, Calif Arts & Archit, Art Digest, Am Artist & Ford Times Mags. *Mailing Add:* 327 Cumberland St San Francisco CA 94114

From *Who's Who in American Art*
Sixteenth Edition, 1983

WATERCOLORS BY GEORGE POST

[in order of appearance]

Six Mile Canyon, Virginia City

Land's End (top)

Oakland Estuary (bottom)

Sonora Cabin (top)

Pardee House (bottom)

St. Ignatius

I BACKGROUND AND EARLY YEARS, 1906-1933

[Interview 1: February 5, 1983]##

Family and Childhood

Teiser: Today is February 5, 1983, and we're interviewing George Post. The interviewer is Ruth Teiser, with some help from Catherine Harroun. The place is the studio in San Francisco where Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun work. And I should add that we're all good friends of many years' standing.

Post: Oh, that's a nice introduction! [laughter] Very neat!

Teiser: And I should also explain that, for reasons which will perhaps come out in this interview, George Post is addressed by some people as "Pete." So he'll probably be called Pete in this interview.

To begin with, where and when were you born?

Post: I was born in Oakland on September 29, 1906.

Teiser: And who were your parents?

Post: My mother was Ruth Godfrey and my father was George Booth Root, Junior. My grandfather was George Booth Root, and I was dubbed George Booth Root III.

Teiser: And it was at your grandfather's house in Oakland that you were born?

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 122.

Post: Yes, I was born in my grandfather's house in Oakland.

Teiser: Your parents had been married some time before you were born, had they?

Post: Well, let's see, they were married in 1900, and I was born in 1906, with my twin brother.

Teiser: And had they always lived with your grandfather?

Post: No. My mother and father were divorced soon after I was born. But I lived with my grandfather until I was seven.

Teiser: Let's then go back. Who were your mother's parents? Do you know anything about them?

Post: My mother's father was John Godfrey.

Teiser: Was that the Godfrey family that lived--

Post: In Santa Monica. But then they later came to Concord. Treat was the last name of my mother's mother's folks. There's a street in Concord called Treat Avenue where the old ranch was.

My mother's name was Ruth Godfrey Root Post. Her sisters were Marian Godfrey Eliassen, Helen Godfrey Rue, and Eleanor Godfrey, who never married.

Teiser: Do you remember your mother's father and mother?

Post: No, I never knew them or saw them. Her father was the youngest colonel in the civil war and became a famous lawyer in Los Angeles.

Teiser: Your father's family, then, the Roots-- Do you know anything about their background?

Post: Well, I know that my Aunt Nan, my father's sister, was born in Ashtabula, Ohio, and Aunt Kate and my father were born in San Francisco.

Teiser: Your grandfather--what did you call him?

Post: Gramp.

Teiser: Did he come from there?

Post: Yes. Ashtabula, Ohio. That's where they lived until they came west.

Teiser: Do you know about when they came west?

Post: No. They came to San Francisco, and then, just before the fire, they moved to Oakland, to 1006 Sixth Avenue, where I was born.

Teiser: What did your grandfather do? You said it was quite a large house. He must have had a rather substantial occupation.

Post: Well, he was an accountant. It was a wonderful big house, it would be called a mansion today. It was on a quarter of a block, quarter of a city block. It had a great barn and storage tank and little summer house, chicken yard. It was a large place for a city.

Harroun: It was a Victorian house?

Post: Yes, a beautiful old house. That's all industrial area now, and those houses have long been torn down.

Teiser: What was it like growing up there?

Post: Well, I sure enjoyed it. I always seemed to have a good time and was never depressed as a child.

Teiser: You had one brother and two sisters?

Post: I have a twin brother and two sisters.

Teiser: Your brother is--

Post: My brother is still living, but my two sisters have died, one of them not long ago.

Teiser: Your brother's name is Jack--

Post: Frost. Jack Frost, John R. Frost. The reason for that is that I lived with my grandfather and his sister, who was my Great-Aunt Soph. (After Aunt Soph died, I lived alone with my grandfather.) My Aunt Nan and Uncle Carlton Frost adopted my brother Jack, so he went to Sonora to live on their ranch. They were childless, so they adopted Jack because they needed a young person to help with the ranch. Then, after Aunt Soph, his sister, died, I stayed

Post: on along with Gramp for a year and started grammar school. Then my Aunt Kate, Mrs. Fletcher, came down from Alaska and thought that Gramp shouldn't have to do this forever and ever.

Teiser: Your Aunt Kate was Gramp's daughter?

Post: Yes. So they gave me a choice of whether to go with Aunt Kate back to Alaska to live (my Uncle Charles, her husband, was employed in the Alaska-Juneau Mining Company), or, would I rather go and live with my mother. (Well, I'd never--I'd seen my mother, but I didn't remember her because I was so young when she left, when she was divorced from my father which created a rift in the family.) So I was given the choice whether to go back with Aunt Kate to Juneau, Alaska, and live, or to go to my mother. And so I decided that I would go to my mother, even though I didn't know her.

Living in Gold Hill, Nevada

Post: They were living in Gold Hill, Nevada, because her husband, my stepfather (his name was Post), was superintendent of the Yellow Jacket Mine in Gold Hill.

Teiser: What was his first name?

Post: Walter, Walter Post. So off I went. Got on the train. I was so excited, I was going to Nevada on a train, all alone! I was seven! [laughter] Gramp put me on the train, and off I went to Reno, and my mother and stepfather were to meet me. I'm sure glad that they did! [laughter]

Teiser: How did you get to Gold Hill then?

Post: They had a 1915 Dodge. It's about thirty miles from Reno up to Virginia City. Gold Hill is a little mining town just south of Virginia City, in the big Comstock Lode area. You have to go up the Geiger Grade. It was wonderfully exciting going up to Virginia City!

Teiser: Did you like your mother and stepfather when you--

Post: Oh, yes! I thought they were marvelous. And my sisters Ann and Romola were there, and we had a wonderful childhood. Of course, Romola was above us, she was probably sixteen or seventeen, and

George Post,
aged about four

George Post in his studio
on Edith Street,
San Francisco, 1943

Photograph by Ruth Teiser

Post: Ann and I were just little kids compared to her. But Ann and I had a lot of fun together living in Gold Hill, Nevada, where I started grammar school--I mean continued. I started grammar school in Oakland.

Teiser: What school did you go to in Oakland?

Post: Franklin.

Teiser: Was there a school in Gold Hill:

Post: Oh, yes. Oh, it was a big, old school. It had a skeleton hanging in the closet of the classroom with a chalk in its teeth! Oh that was great fun. All the rooms weren't used by then. Gold Hill had thousands of people at one time, but it had dwindled down to a very few, maybe a hundred, when I lived there. It had a Masonic Hall, Wade's Saloon, and a great big old grammar school. The high school was up further, just up the hill, in Virginia City. I left Gold Hill before I went to high school.

Teiser: Was Ann in the same grade as you?

Post: No, Ann was three years ahead of me.

Teiser: How long did you live there in Gold Hill?

Post: Let's see, I went up--when did I?--it must have been about 1915, and I came back to San Francisco in 1919. Four years.

Teiser: You took your stepfather's name when you went to Nevada?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: And your sisters had taken his name, had they?

Post: Yes, it was because my sisters' name was Post, and I thought, well, I'll be a Post too, because I didn't want to be different from them! So we all went by the name of Post, and none of it was legalized or anything. But we were minors and our stepfather was supporting us, so that made it legal. I found out years later when I went to get a passport that as long as my stepfather--I had to get a, what is it?

Teiser: Affidavit.

Post: Affidavit that he supported me while I was a minor that my name was legally Post.

Teiser: I think you've described to us playing games up and down the steep hillsides.

Post: Oh, the sluice boxes carried water to Virginia City. They were up above on the hills going along. There were two rows of them, and they brought water from Washoe Lake, further up, I guess, in the Sierras, to Virginia City. They were big wooden troughs, but they were covered over with wooden planks. So we walked the sluice boxes for miles.

Teiser: Were they elevated?

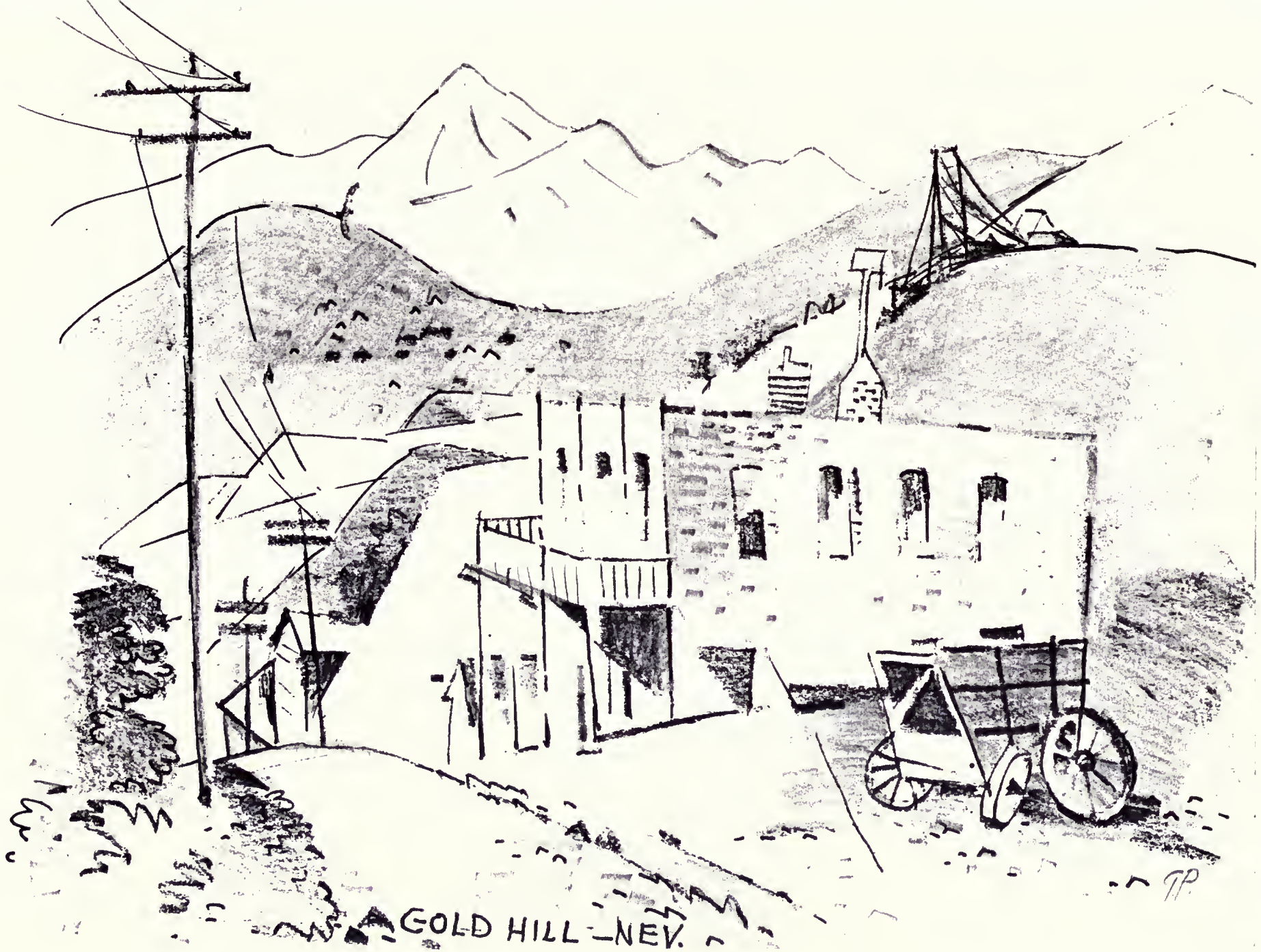
Post: Well, they were elevated maybe in an indentation, but they followed the contour of the hills pretty well, just lay on the ground on heavy planking. But we loved the sluice boxes because once you climbed up to them you could walk just level for miles, for miles. Then, there were little frogs, because a lot of the water leaked out, so there were little frogs around to play with. [laughter] You know, things like that. It was delightful!

Harroun: What kind of house did you have in Gold Hill?

Post: Well, the first one, in Crown Point Ravine, was just a small little house, but it was very comfortable. It was tucked back under the hill. Sometimes in winter it would get completely covered in snow; you'd have to dig a tunnel to get into it. It wasn't a big house. The second house belonged to the mining company where my stepfather worked, and that was quite a big house. It was maybe on the opposite side of the town from where we were living in the ravine.

There was a big trestle across the ravine that brought the V and T [Virginia and Truckee] Railroad into Virginia City from Reno and Carson Valley, and so that trestle was the joy of our existence because you could scramble all over from one bracing--You know how trestles are built, they're just full of wonderful bracings and planks and things to climb around on. And the other reason we loved it so, because we were forbidden to go on it! [laughter]

There was a walkway just below the tracks along the side of the trestle that people could walk across, a nice little walkway with a fence of course. But that was too easy! We'd walk across the tracks [laughter] because we were always sure when the two trains were coming, one coming in the morning and one going in the afternoon, and so we were very careful not to walk


GOLD HILL NEV.

Post: across the tracks then, which were right on top. The little walkway was maybe twelve feet below. But Bummer, our dog, was the only dog in Gold Hill that could walk across the ties with us, across the bridge! And he did it very neatly! Instead of using the walkway! [laughter]

Teiser: Did you ever get caught?

Post: No!

Teiser: This was you and Ann?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: [laughter] Romola would disdain such childish pranks?

Post: Well, that was a little, yes, below her dignity! [laughter]

Teiser: Did you like school there?

Post: Yes, yes, I did. And as a matter of fact it must have been a good teacher because when I had to go to San Francisco, I seemed to be a little bit ahead of the rest of the students.

Teiser: How many kids were there in the school in Gold Hill?

Post: There were perhaps a hundred people living in Gold Hill at that time. I don't know how many kids there were at school, but there must have been, oh, at least 25 or 30 maybe, in the eight different grades.

Teiser: Did you make friends among other kids?

Post: Yes. Oh, what were their names--those two kids we played with? But Ann and I were sort of back in the Crown Point Ravine, which was really sort of slightly isolated from the little town of Gold Hill itself. So we usually played alone.

Teiser: Ann and Romola had been with their mother all the time, had they?

Post: Yes, in Oakland. Then they of course lived with them when she went to Gold Hill to live.

Teiser: At the time of their divorce, Pete, your father left this country, did he?

Post: Yes, he went to Montreal to live, in Canada, and he worked for the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and he never came back to this country, except years later, when he was retired, up to Aunt Nan's ranch in Tuolumne County. But, oh, let's see, where did I leave off?

Teiser: You were in school. How did you happen to come back to the Bay Area then, four years later?

Post: Well, my stepfather found work in San Francisco, because the mines were petering out up there at that time and there was very little activity, so there was no more work in the Yellow Jacket Mine, and that was the only one left in Gold Hill. There was the Ophir Mine, the only other one I remember, and that had shut down. Of course, the big ones up in Virginia City, the Consolidated Virginia and some of those were still working, at least Con Virginia I know was working at that time.

Teiser: So the family moved down here.

Post: Yes.

Teiser: All five of you?

Post: No, while we were in Gold Hill, Romola went to Reno and got a job as a nurse. It was during the First World War, and she became a nurse and married the ambulance driver, George Walker, who was very good looking, and they went off and had babies and then separated and then Romola got married again and finally we lost all track of Romola.

Teiser: Lost all track of her?

Post: Lost all track of her.

Teiser: Have you ever known her children?

Post: Yes! There were four little kids. Buddy, Robert, Jimmy--I don't remember the name of the fourth. Anyway, I saw, I guess it was Bob (Robert) and Jimmy years later. That's all I ever found of her.

High School and Art School in San Francisco

Teiser: So you and Ann and your parents then came down, the four of you, to San Francisco?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: What kind of job did your stepfather have here?

Post: He worked for Joost Brothers on Market Street, a big hardware store. Right at the foot of Haight Street it was, at Haight and Market.

Teiser: Where did you live then?

Post: On Stanyan Street right near Golden Gate Park, which was joyful because I investigated or adventured all through the park and got to know every inch of it. And then Polytechnic High School was right next to the park and only three or four blocks from where we lived so that's where Ann and I went to school, high school, to Poly High.

Teiser: You finished grammar school here in San Francisco?

Post: I finished one year at the Grattan Grammar School in San Francisco, and then went to Poly High.

Harroun: You had a story about hearing some roaring--

Post: Oh, yes, when we first came to San Francisco we heard this moaning, or roaring, in the distance, and I thought they were elephants, but it turned out they were fog horns! [laughter]

Teiser: You thought they were in the zoo?

Post: No, in Golden Gate Park.

Teiser: Did you like San Francisco? It must have been so different from Gold Hill?

Post: Oh, it was. I was just devastated at first because I loved the mountains and the freedom and the hills, but after a year or two I got to like San Francisco, and of course now it's my most favorite place in the world!

Teiser: What sort of course did you take in high school, or did you have much choice?

Post: Of course I took art because I thought that would be a lot of fun.

Teiser: When did you first think art would be fun?

Post: Well, I was always drawing some funny thing on wrapping paper or butcher paper or something. I was always drawing things, I just liked to draw!

Teiser: Even when you were a little tiny kid?

Post: Well, yes--ever since I was five or six anyway. And so it just sort of came naturally. So I took art and sculpture, and then of course the academics, all the academics. I had to take history and math and civics, you know.

Teiser: This is in high school you're speaking of?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: You took sculpture in high school too?

Post: Yes. Oh, I loved that. Clay, it was just clay though.

Teiser: Well, still, that was surprising that they offered it.

Post: Yes, wasn't it? It was a good school. Of course, it's all shut up now, it's not even in use anymore. But it was a very fine high school in those years.

Teiser: You had an art teacher whom you liked very much.

Post: Oh, Miss Frances Wolfenbarger. She glommed on to me because she thought I'd make a good artist. And so I was lucky that she took such a good interest in me because I did like art. So because of her--she submitted work of mine, two or three works maybe (one especially; it was a drawing of the Parthenon in Greece that I copied from out of a book or something) which fetched me a scholarship to art school!

Teiser: Wonderful! What were the other drawings?

Post: I don't know [laughing], probably the discus thrower or something! [laughter] I don't remember the others. I'll never forget laboring through the Parthenon! [laughter]

Teiser: Were you drawing from nature at all, or from life, at the time?

Post: No. Oh, well, we did still life of course. In those days they didn't have field trips like today in art schools. Of course this was high school, so you had to draw little vases and cups and--oh, what did we call those white things? They were sculptures, they were all just pure-white plaster statues.

##

Teiser: At home did you draw anything else?

Post: Yes, I'd draw a lot, I liked to draw out of my head or things like that.

Well, when I was first in grammar school I was of course fascinated by trains and locomotives and one of the things I liked most was drawing a great big locomotive tearing down the tracks head on right into the foreground where a little girl had been tied to the tracks and the hero was just about to turn the switch (which was handy by) to save her from instant death, which delighted the class when the teacher pinned it on the wall and invited other classes to come in to see. UNTIL she finally saw the little drama that was being enacted and told me to march up to the wall, take it down, and tear it up in front of the class! I was completely devastated and my instant ego was thoroughly crushed.

Yes, I liked to draw many things, machinery, houses. Architecture especially fascinated me. People and faces did not interest me until I got to art school.

Not until I got to art school did I really do much drawing. But I did enjoy doing it every once in a while, you know, but I liked best being up playing with the kids on the street, or one foot off the gutter! Like all kids. [laughter]

Teiser: What sort of a student were you?

Post: I was very diligent about learning to read and write and do arithmetic and study.

Teiser: You must have shown a lot of promise. You must have done a lot of art work to get a scholarship.

Post: Well, yes, I was diligent. I enjoyed it. It came easy to me, and I enjoyed doing it. And I was fortunate in that Miss Wolfenbarger at high school took such an interest that it was through her that I won a scholarship to art school, California School of Fine Arts. Now the San Francisco Art Institute.

I had a paper route during those days. The Call. Before it was called the Call-Bulletin, it was just The Call. So I had that to do. And every Saturday I had to go solicit for new customers when I was delivering The Call. I had a paper route from Stanyan Street on the east side of the park, along the panhandle, Oak, to Masonic, and then back to the park on Haight Street. And that was my bailiwick, and I had to find all my customers in that area on my own.

Teiser: Was that when you were in high school?

Post: Yes. I remember we had to spend most of Saturday, at least five or six hours, soliciting for new customers, and I often had the door banged in my face! [laughter]

After two years on Stanyan Street we moved to Oakland and I commuted to San Francisco. I didn't want to change schools. I liked Poly High. I had an eight o'clock class, so I'd have to get up about five in the morning to get to my eight o'clock class because the only way you could get to San Francisco in those days was over the Key Route tracks to the Key Route ferry, to the Ferry Building, and then it took an hour on the old Number Six to get from the Ferry Building, on the trolley car, out to Poly High. So it was a long commute I took in those days for a high school education!

Teiser: Had your grandfather died by then?

Post: No. Aunt Soph, his sister, who really devoted her last years of her life to Jack and me when we were living with our grandfather, had died. He died much later. His daughter, my Aunt Kate, had a house in Oakland on Haddon Road.

Teiser: She had come back from Alaska?

Post: Yes. So she took Gramp and they all went to their house in Oakland to live. Not the old mansion, not my grandfather's house, but Uncle Charlie and Aunt Kate's house, 401 Haddon Road. And, oh, I loved it there, it was such a nice little house. It wasn't little, but it was so much smaller than 1006 Sixth Avenue, which was my grandfather's house. It was very comfortable. I was living with my mother and stepfather in San Francisco at that time, but I'd go over on weekends a lot and stay with Aunt Kate and Uncle Charlie on Haddon Road.

Teiser: Then, when your family moved back to Oakland, you said that some architects in Oakland offered you an apprenticeship?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: How did that happen?

Post: I just don't remember how I met them--through a mutual friend most likely. I wanted to be an architect, and they offered me this apprenticeship. But I had this scholarship for art school, and if I didn't use it I would have lost the benefit of it. So at the last minute I decided to go to art school and forego the apprenticeship.

Harroun: Where was the art school at that time?

Post: California School of Fine Arts, which is the [San Francisco] Art Institute today, was on California and Mason. It's the old Mark Hopkins Institute. The old building, the Mark Hopkins school of art, burnt down in 1906, and they built a very nice little wooden Greek sort of structure on the site of the old foundations.

Teiser: About what year was that then?

Post: Let's see, 1924 I graduated from high school, so I started in the fall of '24 in the California School of Fine Arts.

Teiser: Did you like it?

Post: Oh, I <u>loved</u> it! Gee. After I got to art school all ambitions of ever becoming an architect just faded out, faded out. So I never became an architect.

Teiser: Did you try all media, or were there certain kinds of--

Post: Well, you were given a curriculum that you had to follow. The first two years, most of it was life drawing in charcoal, but it certainly teaches you how to draw, even though it's just the figure. But there was also etching and still life and oil painting. There was no watercolor in those days. And design, there was a good design class. Those are the things you had to take; I mean it was part of going to art school.

Teiser: Were there some of those you liked better than others?

Post: I loved the etching; that was a lot of fun.

Harroun: I remember one etching you did that you still have.

Post: Yes, it's up at the ranch near Sonora. I wish I had all the others; it's the only one I've got left. Yes, I liked most of the things I did at art school, but it seems to me etching was more fun than any of the others. There were so many different things you had to do to etch the plate, whereas in drawing all you did was just draw, which I loved to do too. And painting. I wasn't always too good at oil painting, but I did it.

Teiser: How long did you go to art school altogether then?

Post: Until 1927. Two and a half years.

Teiser: Did you work while you were going to art school?

Post: No, no.

Teiser: You didn't have to?

Post: No.

Teiser: The scholarship paid for you?

Post: Well, Miss Wolfenbarger knew this old mining engineer in those nice old apartments on California and Clay Street. It was the Francesca Apartments. And he took an interest in me through Miss Wolfenbarger, so he gave me fifteen dollars a month while I was going to art school, which helped to pay for art supplies and my commute to Oakland; that's about all it did. So while I was going to art school, he gave me fifteen dollars a month! Of course that seemed a lot in those days! [laughter]

Teiser: And you lived with your family?

Post: Yes, in Oakland, after we moved to Oakland.

Teiser: The teachers in the California School of Fine Arts, do you remember any of them particularly?

Post: Well, there was Spencer Macky, and Constance Macky, his wife, and they taught both painting and drawing. And there was Otis Oldfield; he had a lot of new, radical ideas about art. He'd just come back from Paris, and so he was very exciting to work with. And there was Ray Boynton. Let's see, what did he teach? I don't remember. I guess I had one or two classes with him.

Oh, and another one I liked was Piazzoni. What was his first name? Gottardo. We'd go out with him actually on a field trip occasionally.

Teiser: You still didn't go out often when you were in art school, is that right?

Post: Not like they do today, no.

Harroun: Piazzoni did some murals at the San Francisco Public Library.

Post: Yes, the library.

Teiser: What did he teach?

Post: Oil. They didn't teach watercolor in those days, nobody knew much about it. It was regarded as sort of sketching, for doing quick sketches out in the field, and then you'd come back and translate them into big oil paintings, that sort of thing.

Teiser: Not a serious medium in itself?

Post: No, not as it has become. At least in California today, in the last thirty years, it has become a very important medium.

Teiser: Well, did you do much watercolor while you were a student?

Post: Not too much, no, because, well, you'd have to go alone.

Teiser: Did it appeal to you particularly at that time?

Post: No, I don't think so, but I remember doing a lot of things with watercolor and opaque watercolor while I was in art school.

First Jobs

Teiser: Then, you said you had to get out and get to--

Post: To work.

Teiser: What did you do?

Post: I worked at Metcalf and Little for a while, in 1928.

Teiser: What was that?

Post: That was an advertising agency. I did pamphlets and brochures. I remember designing the brochure for something at the St. Francis Hotel, and I had a big Christmas tree--maybe it was a Christmas party--in front of the main entrance to the St. Francis Hotel. I still have some of those funny little things tucked away. I remember doing a very colorful little brochure for some southwestern company, because it was the mesas and the Arizona and New Mexico landscape with oranges and yellows and browns and a pale, bright blue. I think I still have some of those! [laughter] Would you like to see them?

Harroun: I'd love to.

Teiser: Had you ever been in the Southwest?

Post: No, not yet!

Teiser: Did it look like Nevada?! [laughter]

Post: No, no, Nevada is sort of barren and brown compared to Arizona.

Teiser: How did you happen to get that job?

Post: Well, because I went around with a funny little portfolio, with nothing but nude charcoal drawings, looking for a job [laughter], and I'd go to all the advertising agencies. I had to find these things myself! I'd go to advertising agencies and studios, you know, that did commercial drawings and things. But I also went down Mission Street one day with my portfolio to-- I don't think it was Redlicks--oh, it was the Union Furniture Company on Mission, the Union Furniture Company, to ask if they could use me for anything, and, by golly, the got me to do four room suites in pen and ink. A living room suite and a dining room suite and two bedroom suites. And so that was one of the things that I found to do besides, oh, a number of others too, mostly furniture suites.

Teiser: Did you work full time for the advertising agency, or were they just odd jobs?

Post: They were just odd jobs on my own. I'd have to do them at home. I wasn't hired to go there and work.

Teiser: Did you do those jobs for long?

Post: Oh, for maybe a year.

Teiser: Could you make enough money at them?

Post: Well, no, I didn't make much money, but I made enough to help with the board and room, and what little money I needed--I didn't need much. I remember going into a bakery every day and getting a bearclaw for a nickel! [laughter]

Teiser: Did you do anything else regularly, or just these odd jobs of art work?

Post: Just these odd jobs, yes. Freelance, most of it was.

Teiser: Were you doing some work of your own, for your own pleasure, at the same time?

Post: Oh, I think I did, yes. During this period my interest in watercolor grew. Watercolor as a medium was just what I wanted. I've always liked being outdoors rather than inside. Inside I could never get inspired. Even in cold stormy weather I could get excited and stimulated to paint outdoors. I guess you could say I was self-taught. The silly little things we did in high school were at most a springboard to get started and see what lay ahead.

Then art school was mostly charcoal life drawing which was great and taught you to draw, and oil painting was a requirement. But watercolor, if used at all, could be a sort of guide for oil. Oil in art school was still life, portrait and nude figures, and occasionally an outdoor field trip. Oil painting has always been the most important medium for all artists of all time. But because the climate in California is usually excellent for outdoor painting, watercolor has become very popular.

Teiser: One of the other things that we didn't mention: you worked briefly at the C & H Sugar plant, didn't you?

Post: Let's see, that was '29, right in there, for a year.

Teiser: How'd you happen to--

Post: Well, my brother Jack was working there. He'd left the ranch. He had been adopted by my aunt and uncle in Shaw's Flat, and he saw no future for his staying in Sonora. I don't think he finished high school. He just left one day, and came down and found a job at the Pullman factory in Richmond. Then he heard about the C & H plant, and he went there, and he was there for twenty or thirty years, I guess, in the C & H plant--California and Hawaiian Sugar.

Teiser: So he got a job there?

Post: Yes, and through him I got a job there.

Teiser: This was after art school?

Post: Yes. I worked at the C & H for a year, and enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed it because it was the first time I was really independent and completely on my own. I got so satisfied with my position there--I didn't rise very far in the ranks from that first job. It was picking up a gunny sack and putting it in a hopper. These hoppers kept coming by, and then you'd kick a pedal with your foot, and these clamps would come down and hold the sack to the hopper, and as it went by there a hundred-pound bunch of sugar came down in it, and it kept going. So you had to keep up with the belt. See, these hoppers were on a belt, and it was just continuous. And often you might not get the sack on so it clamped tight enough, and all that sugar would come down on the floor! A hundred pounds that you'd have to sweep up, shovel that up--they had big shovels--and put it in a bin where it went through the whole refining process again. But that didn't happen too often! [laughter]

That was shift work. You went on for two weeks straight, doing that from eight to four; then you got four days off. You came back and started at four, and worked the swing shift from four to midnight. Then you got four days off and came back, and started at midnight and worked till eight in the morning. The graveyard shift. And that was repeated through all the time I was there.

Post: I also went on the cube-sugar department where the cubes were baked in an oven, these big ovens. They were on trays about as big as this table. They were in these ovens that had just little slits in them that you could just shove the tray through. You had to pull them out and bang them down on this moving belt that went along. All the cube sugars then would go to the packing room where they were packed in cartons by ladies.

Teiser: It wasn't very interesting work?

Post: I didn't think of it as being interesting or uninteresting, but I enjoyed it because, as I say, I had a certain amount of independence and freedom, and did a lot of things on my own, of course.

But I got to thinking one day, "What did I go to art school for? I got a scholarship to art school, and here I am perfectly happy ending up in a sugar refinery!" And, you know, this was one of the hardest things I ever did: the next day I quit. I thought, "If I don't do it now, I never will."

So I just quit--I had a little money saved--and went back to San Francisco to look for any kind of work there that had something to do with art.

Teiser: Was that when you went to work for the lithographer then?

Post: Yes, and for Metcalf and Little. And doing brochures. Well, that was a hard thing for me to do because--

Teiser: Had you been painting all the time though while you were there?

Post: I suppose I did a little now and then.

Teiser: Not really much?

Post: Not really much, no.

Teiser: When did you marry, Pete?

Post: 1930.

Teiser: And you married--

Post: Lou Rusk MacLean.

Teiser: And you have a daughter.

Post: Daughter Shelley was born in '32.

Teiser: And what were you working at in those years?

Post: Well, I was working for Knight-Counihan [Printing Company] at the time, from 1930 to 1932.

Teiser: What sort of work--

Post: They were lithographers and printers. They were on Sansome Street, just under Telegraph Hill.

Teiser: Was that a full-time job?

Post: Yes. And the Jean Berté watercolor type of printing had just come out.* I guess you'd call it watercolor. It was a French invention, and it was done on printing presses, and you had to cut rubber plates that would go on the printing press. You'd make a design, or designs would come in from other artists or other advertising agencies. That's what made all these pamphlets and brochures and different things. You're given the original drawing or painting to do, and then you'd have to make an outline to separate, but just an outline drawing, the different areas of color. Some of them would overlap. And then when the different plates were run through different inks on different presses, on one piece of paper it came out pretty close to the original.

Teiser: You were cutting these plates?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Did your experience in etching help?

Post: Yes, it helped a lot.

Teiser: Were you doing some original designs too there?

Post: Yes, I also did some designs. The plates were rubber, and you had to have an awful sharp little knife, pointed knife, to cut through the rubber. The rubber was fastened very securely on metal, on a thin metal plate which was clamped to the presses. It was fun; I enjoyed all this so much.

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*According to Albert Sperisen, Knight-Counihan had exclusive rights to the process in northern California.

Teiser: Did you?

Post: Yes. That was when Lou and I were living on Telegraph Hill when Shelly was born.

Teiser: Do you remember any of the jobs you were working on for Knight-Counihan?

Post: Well, one was for the St. Francis Hotel, I remember that one. And one of the fun ones was the opening program for the Fox Theater on Market Street!

Teiser: Was there lots of color?

Post: There were maybe five or six different colors.

Teiser: My word! What happened to end that?

Post: Lou had tuberculosis and had to go to Arequipa Sanitorium, so it sort of busted up the little attic garret we were living in on North Point Street, right near the Ghirardelli chocolate factory. That's when I went to sea. I got a job on an Associated Oil tanker to New York and back, through the Canal, and that took about two months to do that. Late 1932 to early 1933. I guess that was the only sea trip I took. And when I came back, whoever I sublet the place to had left and taken a lot of things with them and everything was askew. I couldn't find anything much that I was hoping to save.

Teiser: And Lou was in the sanitorium at this time?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Where was Shelley?

Post: Lou's mother, Hester MacLean, was taking care of Shelley at her home in Menlo Park.

Teiser: How did you happen to leave Knight-Counihan?

Post: I guess because of the Depression or something--there was not enough work. I imagine that was it. So I got a job on the oil tanker.

Teiser: Wasn't it awful to work on an oil tanker?

Post: I enjoyed it because it was adventurous. I guess the work wasn't too lovely, but I loved being on the seas.

##

Teiser: Did you do any drawings and watercolors at sea?

Post: Yes, oh yes, I did, oh, one every day I guess, maybe sometimes two. I have most of those. Haven't I showed you those?

Teiser: Yes. You have. They're wonderful.

Post: I surely enjoyed it.

Teiser: Did the other guys on the ship think that was funny of you to--

Post: To draw?

Teiser: Yes.

Post: No, they enjoyed it. They thought it was great.

Teiser: What kind of people were they? Were there a lot of people like you who weren't professional seamen?

Post: No, they were just maritime sailors. They were, you know--some of them drank bay rum [laughter]. At least they said they did. Some would skip ship in Panama or something. Just commercial, I guess you'd call them, commercial sailors.

Teiser: You didn't have to be a union member?

Post: No. Oh, the big union thing didn't start till '34, wasn't it? The big waterfront strike. That was after I got back.

Teiser: I'd like to take you up to, but not into, the WPA. When you came back, what happened? We might stop just before you talk about the WPA days.

Post: Oh yes, because that was one of the happiest times. I won't go into that.

Teiser: We'll go into it later. You returned from the sea voyage--

Post: I came back with some paintings done aboard ship. The oil tanker berthed at Bayonne, New Jersey, and so I did some painting in Newark. Then, I'd go over to New York on the subway, and I did a

Post: lot of sight-seeing and a bit of sketching in New York. Anyway I brought these back. Then later in California I was painting up and down the coast at Mendocino and up at Aunt Nan's in the Mother Lode country so I had quite a nice little portfolio of things to show.

Teiser: Was this watercolor?

Post: Yes, all watercolor.

II INITIAL SUCCESSES AND INFLUENCES 1931-1946

Post: My first one-man show was at the Galerie Beaux Arts, 144 Geary Street, in October, 1931. I got some good reviews from that show, and from then on I started exhibiting in San Francisco and Oakland and around, and then went further east until I got the reputation that I have. I don't know how else it started.

Teiser: Did you start selling too?

Post: Yes, oh yes.

Teiser: Who bought your paintings?

Post: I haven't any idea now. But I do know that because of showing with the California Watercolor Society traveling shows, my things got around the country and many well-known galleries bought them: such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Virginia Museum in Richmond, Virginia, and the Seattle Art Museum, the San Diego Museum of Fine Arts, the Santa Barbara Museum, Mills College, Grinnell College, the Henry Gallery in Seattle, etc., etc. for their collections.

Teiser: Then you were for some years just supporting yourself by painting and selling?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: My word! That must have been marvelous.

Post: Well, I didn't do a lot, but it was enough to hold things together and still give Shelley's grandmother money every month to help support Shelley while she was being raised, because I couldn't do it, although I'd go down and get Shelley in Menlo Park every once in a while and bring her up to my studio on Montgomery Street (in what are now Melvin Belli's offices).

And Shelley just loved coming up to San Francisco and staying with me on Montgomery Street. We'd go up to Chinatown and eat every night! [laughter] And get a wonderful meal for fifteen cents. Jacopetti's was just across the street, and you could get a huge turkey sandwich and a whiskey sour there for fifteen cents each! [laughter] Oh, those were great days. We didn't make much money, but everyone seemed so happy and carefree in a way.

Teiser: You were divorced by then?

Post: Yes.

In the spring of 1934 I thought that I could help Charlie, my cousin Charles, who was Aunt Kate and Uncle Charlie's son, who was mining near Sonora. Aunt Nan was grubstaking him because she thought there would still be some gold on the little hill where she moved to after she sold the home ranch, which was a mile or two away. She thought maybe there'd be some gold.

Teiser: This was at Shaw's Flat?

Post: At Shaw's Flat. So she grubstaked Charlie to mine with two other old miners, Jim Dwyer and Henry Spiekerman, who were there. Then Aunt Nan wrote to me and said, "Why don't you come up and join us and help Charlie build a little compound up here where we can all live." Because they were just sleeping in a tent then. So we built these little houses. You've seen them. And the principal of the Sonora High School said that if we tore down the old grandstand--because they wanted to build a new one of concrete for their football field--we could have the lumber. So the lumber that built the camp is all from the old grandstand! And it was good lumber, you know. Of course it was probably redwood.

Teiser: You were up there then several years?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: So you and Charlie, in effect, built the ranch, built the buildings there?

Post: Yes, with Jim and Henry. Yes.*

Teiser: How did Jim and Henry ever get there?

Post: I can't say, unless Charlie knew of them or someone in the area knew of them--I don't know just how--

Teiser: They were miners, weren't they?

Post: They were miners, real hard-rock miners.

Teiser: Well, that was quite a bunch of you.

Post: Wasn't it! Oh yes, that was fun too.

Teiser: And you were painting all that time?

Post: Yes. And then I got a commission to do the Sonora High School mural. All my contemporary painters in San Francisco were doing Coit Tower at that time, the WPA murals in the Coit Tower, and I felt so left out of it all. I got in touch with the director of the WPA Art Project and he assigned me to do a mural for the Sonora High School. When the mural was completed, Thomas Carr Howe, who was director of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, came up to see it, bringing with him Willard Van Dyke to photograph it. Van Dyke had done some WPA work and a film called "The River." Howe had been interested in my work as a result of the paintings I had submitted each month for the "California Artists" shows that he had instigated at the Legion of Honor in the early thirties.

One of the first paintings, I guess, I submitted to a museum was when the San Francisco Museum of Art opened in 1932. I was in the opening exhibition with two paintings at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

Teiser: Do you remember what they were?

Post: One was called "California Barn." It was a big old barn down in the Santa Cruz mountains. It belonged to some friends of my Aunt Eleanor. Aunt Eleanor was living in Santa Cruz then, doing lab work in the Soquel hospital. Let's see, what was the other painting? "The Stream."

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*See also pages 31-35.

Teiser: You started out immediately doing landscapes?

Post: Yes, I always liked working outdoors. Of course, I liked doing still life and flower studies too. Flowers with a pot or tub can be arranged in most interesting compositions. The subjects of the paintings I first submitted to the Legion of Honor and the San Francisco Museum of Art, however, were landscapes.

Teiser: Let me ask you one thing here. Maybe this is something you want to think about. What were the influences upon your styles as a watercolorist?

Post: There was an artist shown at the Vickery, Atkins & Torrey gallery. His name was Stanley Wood. I saw some watercolors of his in the twenties, or maybe it was the early thirties. Anyway, I was so impressed with his style. I was used to the sort of precise illustrative English watercolor style. I think he influenced me more than anyone I can think of.

Teiser: I don't know anything about him. Was he well known?

Post: I haven't heard of him again, but I know that it was that exhibition of his that I saw that gave me a real spurt, or a real feeling that, "Gee, I would like to do this sort of thing." Apparently he had a way of doing something just the way I felt it should be done for myself. I don't know what I would think of them today because that was the only time I ever saw anything of his, but it was an incentive; that was the main, big incentive for me to want to do this. The work of Stuart Davis was another I admired greatly.

Teiser: You said that you still have a picture at Shaw's Flat--

Post: "The Stream." Down in Dragoon Gulch is where I did it, just below our camp. I still have it.

Teiser: And you said it was the picture that really gave you the send-off?

Post: A good send-off.

Teiser: It was admired at the time?

Post: And very good reviews.

Post: Howe took it to San Francisco to show it at the Legion of Honor. I had seven paintings in the show, in August 1934.

[Interview 2: February 13, 1983]##

Teiser: This is the second interview with George Post. It's a Sunday afternoon at 840 Green, Catherine Harroun's house.

I'm looking at your scrapbook. This goes back to some of the things we talked about last time. There's a clipping here showing a picture of you as a young man and saying that you had got a scholarship to the California School of Fine Arts, as you said.

Post: Yes, from high school.

Teiser: This is a clipping dated May 17, 1924. It says that, "Three years ago, when only fourteen, he designed and submitted to Mayor James Rolph, Junior, plans for a new stadium in Golden Gate Park adjacent to Polytechnic High."

Post: Yes.

Teiser: How did you happen to do it?

Post: Oh gosh, I don't know. Maybe Miss Wolfenbarger suggested it, my art teacher there. I don't remember now. I know I made an elaborate pencil drawing with some color in it of this great stadium. It wasn't oval, it was more rectangular, as I remember, with a pergola going around the top of it! And vines coming down! [laughter] I'm sure it never got beyond the waste basket!

Teiser: Here's a clipping of 1931 on an exhibit that you and someone named Wickson had.

Post: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Guest Wickson.

Post: Guest Wickson, yes. I don't remember him, but I remember we had shows. That was my first show I ever had, at the Beaux Arts.

Teiser: This sounds as if each of you had a one-man show because it shows a picture, "Yerba Buena Island from Telegraph Hill," and it's reproduced here, and it says, "is included in the artist's

Teiser: one-man show now current at the Gallerie Beaux Arts. The collection includes watercolors painted in Nevada, California and Canada." When were you in Canada?

Post: Oh, I took a bus trip up to Canada in I think it was 1929, on a Greyhound bus just because I wanted to go somewhere. I went to Vancouver, and I know I did two or three paintings up in Vancouver; they must have been included in this show.

Teiser: Did you always like to paint water?

Post: Always. Any seaport or seashore has always fascinated me. Especially seaports are so exciting because of the trade element, I guess; the ships and the railroads all come together in seaports.

Teiser: Here's a 1933 clipping of a show. "Home after a trip to New York." That was after you went to sea, was it?

Post: Yes, at the Art Center Gallery on Montgomery. It was where Melvin Belli's place is now. I had a studio upstairs at 730 Montgomery. A Chinese broom factory was on the ground floor, and upstairs were these little studio apartments with mezzanines on the second floor. They were fascinating. They each had one big room with a big skylight and a mezzanine where you had a bed; you went up a little ladder to a bed and a closet. Then underneath the mezzanine was a little tucked-in kitchen about three by four feet with a three-burner gas stove in it. Of course it didn't have a bathroom, that was just a little place way in the back. And it was $12.50 rent a month. [laughter]

Teiser: Who else lived there when you were there?

Post: Well, Tom Lewis lived there. Oh, I wish I could remember the others. There was a well-known photographer who lived on the street side that looked out on Montgomery Street, and he did very fine portraits of children. Do you remember who he was?

Harroun: Jay Risling?

Post: Yes! That's who it was. They're the only ones now that I can remember who lived there. I think I lived there about two years, but different artists came and went.

Teiser: Were there others who lived up and down that block?

Post: Well, yes, Maynard Dixon lived next door at 728.

Teiser: Was he married to--

Post: He was married--let's see, he wasn't married to Edith Hamlin at that time. Dorothea Lange!

Teiser: Did she live there too then?

Post: I don't ever remember seeing her. I don't think maybe they were living together then.

Teiser: What was Maynard Dixon like?

Post: Well, he was a very colorful character. He was tall and gaunt and very western, and he had a fine mustache and he always, it seemed to me, wore a Stetson hat. He was full of fun and loved to tell tall tales. He was a fascinating person.

Teiser: Did you like his paintings?

Post: Well, yes, I was quite awed by them in those days. Of course, they were very handsomely done; they were posters, really. They were just simply big, flat areas, and very striking.

Teiser: Did those of you who painted look at each other's work much? Did you discuss each other's work?

Post: No, I don't-- We didn't talk much about art! [laughter]

Teiser: What was the Art Center, do you remember? Where you had this show in 1933 [referring back to clipping].

Post: Well, it was on Montgomery, in that same black, in the 700 block.

Teiser: It says that you had previously exhibited at the Art Center, Beaux Arts, and Gelber-Lilienthal.

Post: Yes, I did have a show there [referring to Gelber-Lilienthal]. I don't know how I met them. They were awfully nice. It was a beautiful little bookstore.

Teiser: Then it mentions that you were in the 1934 group show at the Legion of Honor. This says, "Dr. Walter Heil has inaugurated a series of monthly group showings of works by contemporary California artists . . . The watercolor section is the better of the two [sections], and the star performer therein, so to speak, is George Post."

Teiser: It says of "Stream," "Probably the best watercolor that Post has yet done." Is that the one that's at Shaw's Flat, done in Dragoon Dulch?

Post: Yes! [laughing] That's the same old one.

Teiser: That must have been very exciting, all that.

Post: Well, it was. It really got me started at least as someone of importance in the art world of San Francisco.

Teiser: And you started selling?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: How much did you sell your paintings for then?

Post: Oh, about twenty-five dollars, I guess! [laughing] Thirty dollars, maybe. Fifty. Then a hundred.

Teiser: How much do you think Maynard Dixon was selling his paintings for?

Post: Well, he had a big, good name by then, and I don't know. I never asked him. I suppose he was doing very well, [but] maybe he wasn't either. It was the Depression.

Shaw's Flat and Sonora in the Mother Lode

Teiser: These clippings, some of them are dated and some of them aren't dated. Here is a picture of the mural at the Sonora High School. That was done for the WPA?

Post: Yes, that was WPA. You see, I had gone to Sonora in 1933.*

Teiser: To Shaw's Flat outside of Sonora?

Post: Yes, Shaw's Flat, about two miles out of Sonora. And if we tore the old grandstand down that was in the Sonora High School and hauled it away they would give us the lumber. So it was with that lumber that we built these cabins on Aunt Nan's property

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*See also pp. 25-26.

Post: there at Shaw's Flat. And the cabins are still standing! They're still there. And we expected at the time they would be just temporary. Of course Aunt Nan had these wonderful illusions that we would strike a big pocket, and she would build a handsome stone mansion. But the mansion never occurred, and the little cabins are still there and doing very well!

Teiser: Did you pan a lot of gold and dig a lot?

Post: I didn't do the panning, but I did the hoisting. You see, a pocket mine follows a porphyry dike down a vein, and it's along the porphyry that you find these pockets. I was the one that let the bucket down into the hole, and Charlie and his partner would go down this ladder into the mine with dynamite, and then the bucket would come down. It would go down on the edge of the ladder; it was sort of a track for the bucket. It was a big round bucket with a hook on it, and it went right down at an angle about like that. [gesturing]

Teiser: Forty-five degrees?

Post: Yes. And they'd go down there and put two or three sticks of dynamite in, and then I'd haul them up as fast as I could! [laughter] And then about two or three minutes later, whang! the dynamite would go off. Then they'd have to go down and shovel all this loose ore and earth into the bucket which I'd haul up and dump! [laughter] That was real primitive mining.

Teiser: What did you do with the ore you brought up then?

Post: Then we'd have to sluice it, and see if it was worth following down any further or whether it would just peter out.

Teiser: Did you get some gold?

Post: Oh, yes, enough to keep us sort of staggering along! [laughter] It was all sort of hopeful, and Aunt Nan of course was sure that the Forty-niners had left a lot of gold. I don't think the Forty-niners left very much of anything; they really scoured that Mother Lode area.

Teiser: You mentioned earlier "the home place" and "the camp." What did you mean by those?

Post: Well, Aunt Nan and Uncle Carlton went up there in 1915, either 1910 or 1915. My aunt's husband worked in a tannery down in the Redwood City area, in a big tannery down there, and his health wasn't too good. They thought they should get away up in the hills or somewhere. So they scouted around, went all over California looking for a place to settle down. And they found this place, a nice little farm. It was in the Shaw's Flat area, and settled there. And that was the home ranch. It wasn't until quite a number of years later that--oh, I should mention this now at this time that while they were at the home ranch, they had, I guess, about twelve or fifteen head of cattle and some sheep, a lot of hens, some ducks and geese. They had at least twelve cows. They made butter and cream which they sold to the Sonora Hotel; it was the Victoria Hotel in those days. I guess they had fruit and berries, blackberries and loganberries. It was a nice little farm.

Teiser: Why did they leave it?

Post: Well, Uncle Carlton died. My brother Jack went up to help on the ranch because they had no children, and Uncle Carlton needed someone up there to help milk the cows. It was a lot of hard work. At the same time I went to Nevada to live with my mother and stepfather in Gold Hill, Jack went to Sonora to live with Aunt Nan and Uncle Carlton, more as a hired hand, I guess, than anything. But after two or three years Jack found out that he'd never get anywehre there, so he just ducked out one day and never went back.

He went to Crockert and found a job in the C & H sugar refinery, and that's how he got his start, because he's done a lot in the sugar refining business since then. He knew if he stayed on the ranch he'd never get anywhere, and he was of course right.

Teiser: So when your Uncle Carlton died, was that then when your Aunt Nan sold the home ranch?

Post: Well, my sister Ann and her husband went up and stayed with her, and they sort of carried on for a while, but it didn't last. So Aunt Nan decided to go back to Oakland and live with her sister, my Aunt Kate, who lived in Oakland. So she sold the home ranch, but she kept the Lone Pine Ranch where our cabins are. A few acres where they grazed the cattle, and she always held onto that.

Teiser: It was something like eighty acres, wasn't it?

Post: Oh, of course, it was eighty acres, yes.

Teiser: And so then she went back to live up there?

Post: She loved that country. I guess her happiest days were up there with her husband. And she held onto these eighty acres, so when the Depression came and Charlie, her nephew, needed something to do (he was out of work), he and his wife and Aunt Nan went up there. Then he started pocket mining, and I happened to come along at that time. I was in desperate need of something, so I went up in 1934 and we started the little cabins up there, that's how it got started.

Teiser: Then was it later that your Aunt Nan had sheep?

Post: Yes. That was Charlie's idea; well, it was Aunt Nan's too. They bought a bunch of sheep. But, I don't know whether it was the lack of water--I think that there wasn't enough water, or something. Anyway, that petered out.

Teiser: When I first saw it--when was that? in the fifties, or the forties, maybe, I don't remember when it was--there was a little house for the sheep, not so small, and there was your house, your cabin, and there was another where Jim and Henry lived--it was small--and there was one where your Aunt Nan and your Aunt Kate lived. That had just had a couple of rooms added onto it when I first saw it. And then below that house, was still another little one.

Post: That's where Charlie and Lucille, Charlie's wife, lived.

Teiser: In the little one below?

Post: Yes. They were all just one room at first, all four of them, and there were no kitchens. The house that Jim and Henry later lived in was where we cooked. The stove was up there.

Teiser: I see. I remember one outhouse.

Post: And one outhouse for the whole shebang! At that time.

Teiser: Then you went up there after you had been having exhibits?

Post: Yes.

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Teiser: I think we lost a few words. You said you didn't go up there much in the earliest days, that it wasn't until you went on the WPA that you went up much.

Post: Right. Because I was so busy at that time trying to get started here in San Francisco.

Teiser: Here is a clipping that is undated. It must have been '35 or thereabouts. It's from the Oakland Tribune: "Artist Mines for Gold and Not Painting." It says, "Post made a trip on a tanker not long since. That was before he started mining. The exhibition," and it's referring to an exhibit at 683 Brockhurst, "is of this trip of ships and the sea decks and cabin interiors. They tell me that young Post has painted one of the best of the PWA works in the state. It is a mural in the Sonora High School. That mural, which I have not seen, offers another excuse to visit Sonora." It was signed H.L. Dungan.

The PWA and the WPA

Teiser: I suppose it was a matter of necessity--you weren't making enough money--is that why you went on PWA?

Post: All the artists got a chance to go on WPA for ninety dollars a month. No matter what you did, everyone got the same amount, whether you were a writer or a musician or an artist, or what you painted, or where you painted, you just got ninety dollars a month, which was a sort of a godsend; it was just wonderful to do.

Teiser: You had, I suppose, to prove that you didn't have much money to get on it in the first place?

Post: I don't remember about that, but I don't think many people had much money. But you had to prove that you had some background to do this sort of thing, that you had some talent, and that you were just not a novice or--

Teiser: Not just a student?

Post: Student, right.

Teiser: It was called the PWA, and then it switched to the WPA?

Post: First it was PWAP, I remember, Public Works Art Project, and then it became WPA.

Teiser: How did you happen to get the Sonora mural commission?

Post: I was in Sonoma at that time. Oh, I'd been away to sea or something and I came back, and all my cohorts and contemporaries were having a merry time doing frescoes and murals, mostly in the Coit Tower. So I felt so out of it and frustrated that I wasn't in there too. I knew the director. So I went to see him and told him, "Gosh, can't I do something? Aren't there some outlying areas in California that need this sort of thing? Courthouses and high schools and all?" And he said, "Yes, we're in desperate need to get things out of the big cities and San Francisco, and get them in the outlying areas."

So I said that I lived in Sonora part of the time, my aunt lived there, and I'd love to do something in the Sonora High School. "Oh," he said, "that would be great, you just make a--" What do you call it? Not a sketch but a--

Teiser: Cartoon?

Post: "--cartoon of what you'd like to do," and that's what I did, and they thought it was great. So that's the mural I put in the Sonora High School!

Teiser: What's the subject of it?

Post: It's in three sections. It's mining and lumbering and agriculture.

Teiser: How long did it take you to execute it?

Post: The mural itself?

Teiser: Yes.

Post: Oh, I guess a month or two.

Teiser: Is that all?

Post: Maybe two months. The fascinating thing about that mural is that it was done in the library of the Sonora High School.

Teiser: You didn't do it in place?

Post: Yes. I did it on the wall with a scaffolding, on canvas. First I had to buy the canvas and glue it to the wall, which was a piece of engineering that I never thought I'd ever get involved in. I don't know how in the world I ever got that canvas up there on the wall without all kinds of wrinkles and tears in it, but I did get it on the wall glued in place. It wasn't small; it was thirty-five feet long and eight feet high, and it was all one piece of canvas.

But anyway, I got it up on the wall--of course I had to build a scaffolding first to get it up--in the reading room in the library of the Sonora High School, where all the kids came in every hour for rest periods or reading. And under all those little eyes [laughter] I had to put this mural together. The first two or three days I was kind of flabbergasted, but anyway after a while I got used to it and didn't pay any attention to it. But the kids never went out to play! [laughter] They all came in to watch me paint the mural!

Now it's in the new library. Before it was a perfectly round building, the library, and they tore it down, and they rolled up the canvas and put it in the basement. Then they built the new library, which is much handsomer than the old one. I thought, of course, when they took it down that it would never leave the basement, but they got it out and put it back, and glued it back in the new library, which has a perfectly flat, straight surface. It isn't round. And it looked just as new as it did the day I painted it! [laughter] It did. It was amazing, I couldn't believe it.

So anyway, the mural survived and it's still there, and you're all welcome to go see it anytime you like!

Teiser: So you kind of shuttled back and forth for a time then between Sonora and here?

Post: Yes. But I would spend a lot of time up there, I loved Sonora and the Mother Lode.

Teiser: You also said though that you did a lot of watercolors on the WPA.

Post: Oh, yes, that's really how I learned to paint in watercolor, because here I got ninety dollars a month to go anywhere I wanted up and down the state of California and paint anything I saw. I had to turn in maybe two a week, and of course I

Post: painted about eight a week. I turned in a lot of stuff, and the stuff they wanted they kept. I was so exuberant and happy about it, it seemed like such a sort of renaissance, a sort of fine thing for a country like the United States to do. You think of it maybe happening in Italy or somewhere. It gave all the young people a fresh start and a new outlook on life, and it was all very hopeful, and I found it most exciting and exhilarating and I was very happy about the whole sequence.

Teiser: You said you went up the coast and painted in Mendocino with Sonia Noskoviak?

Post: Sonia Noskoviak was also on the WPA at that time, and she was a very fine photographer. We went up there together once, the first time I saw Mendocino, and I did some sketching and painting and drawing, and Sonia did some photography. The little town of Mendocino was really just falling apart then when I first saw it. Everything was run down. The mill was still at the foot of Little River. I don't think it was operating then even. But the town itself was very shabby and run-down. It wasn't until Bill Zacka came up there later--he was fascinated with the town. It was so unique and sort of New England in style, not so western. It was primarily a lumber town.

He instigated some kind of a program that got it going and started an art school, the Mendocino Art Center, and the town really began to take shape and became a fine attraction, and many motion pictures have been made there because of its uniqueness and its beauty and its setting. It has a wonderful setting.

Teiser: When you first painted there not many people had, I assume?

Post: No. I did some drawings of those little tankhouses of Mendocino that are in the collection of Mills College now.

Teiser: You've always drawn as well as painted a lot, haven't you?

Post: Yes. Oh, I think drawing is one of the fundamental, basic foundations of painting and everything. Just starting to paint is a little too tenuous, it's too--let's see, I can't think of the right word to use. Just starting to paint without any feeling of drawing or composition seems to me a bit presumptuous.

Teiser: So you always draw and then paint?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: But you also sketch and sketch, don't you?

Post: Yes. I don't mean that I draw to make a painting from, I mean that drawing is just a fundamental statement of what you're trying to say and do, and painting is too. I don't mean that you have to combine the two; it isn't that at all. It's just that if you do draw and you like to draw, painting to me becomes so much more tangible.

Teiser: But you sketch all the time, don't you?

Post: All the time, yes. I have many sketchbooks that are full of drawings that I've done all over the world, and they're better than a diary, or a log, or anything. It's a part of my life and part of what I've been through. Yes, I think doing a lot of sketching is very important. Sketching always seems such a sort of word that you'd use--to make a sketch so you could later make a painting from it, but I don't think of sketching as being that.

Teiser: It's important for its own sake?

Post: Yes, right.

Teiser: How long did you work for WPA then?

Post: I think seven or eight months maybe.

Teiser: Does that include the mural at Sonora?

Post: No, that included going up and down the state doing watercolors. That's all I did then were watercolors.

Watercolor as a Medium

Teiser: You paint very fast, don't you?

Post: Yes. That's why I like watercolor so well, because I love to paint outdoors. I'm not happy painting indoors. I do occasionally, of course, but I like to be outdoors no matter what the weather is. Of course, it's much nicer when it's sunny and warm.

Post: So watercolor was so suitable for me as a medium because you don't have to pack an easel or a lot of equipment, and you can just sort of squat down on the ground or on a brick or a little stool, with a drawing board, and paint. I mean it doesn't take much paraphernalia: umbrellas, and easels and chairs. So many of them come with all this equipment to paint. I don't know how some of these ladies lug all that stuff around!

Teiser: Does it take you about an hour to paint an average painting or--

Post: Yes, about an hour. But I like to get an impression of what I'm doing and then sort of clamp it in my mind, interpret it in a way in my mind that I first felt it as an impression, and not to be too literal, but to identify it and relate it to the vicinity and the place that it is, and then interpret it in a quick, fast way and simplify it by leaving out a lot of unnecessary things that are there you don't need, so you use the parts that really make it work rather than all the unessential areas.

Teiser: You started then in the mid-thirties exhibiting at the San Francisco Museum of Art--now the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Post: Yes, I felt fortunate to have two paintings in the first exhibit of the San Francisco Museum of Art when it opened. I think it opened in 1932. And I've had quite a number of solo shows there since then, not in recent years but in the years following the opening, in the forties and fifties.

Teiser: [referring to clipping] Here's one, I guess in 1936, a one-man show "occupies one of the small west galleries" at the San Francisco Museum of Art. This says--this is a review by Julius Cravens, in I don't know what paper, the Chronicle maybe. "During the last couple of years Post has seemed inclined to over-emphasize the importance of architectural structure and to depict it too literally. The result was that while his paintings were expertly executed they tended toward being dry and hard and a bit too prosaic. In the works in the current show, all of which have been done within the last year, Post has swung clear of the limitations of tight architectural representation," and so forth. Was that a just comment?

Post: Yes, I was pleased that he noticed that. Of course, I'm never aware of what I'm doing or how I'm changing, myself, and it takes, I guess, a critic or someone else to observe these things.

Teiser: Can you tell at all how over the years you have changed?

Post: No, I can't. Sometimes I don't think I've changed a whit, but I know I have. I mean it's all so subtle that--

Teiser: When you see your early paintings, for instance when you come upon a painting that you haven't seen for a long time, does it surprise you?

Post: Well, sometimes I'm overcome with ecstasy, and other times I'm sorry that I ever painted it. [laughter]

Teiser: You have, at times, destroyed paintings, haven't you?

Post: Oh, many, yes. Oh yes, you paint so much, especially watercolors which are fast, that if you get one out of ten that's really excellent; you're lucky.

Teiser: You said last time that you and someone started the--

Post: The Art Students League.

Teiser: Yes, what was that?

Post: That was Frank Van Sloun and Maynard Dixon and Ray Strong and myself.

Teiser: What was it?

Post: It was a little art school to teach. And, of course, I'd never taught before. That was my first venture into teaching. That's all it was, just a little class, a little school. I don't remember now how many people came to it, but we called it the Art Students League. Which, of course, is a big art school in New York, it's tremendous, and why we had the gumption, or they did (I didn't), to call it the Art Students League! Anyway, that was my first venture in teaching.

Teiser: Did you like teaching?

Post: Well, I wasn't crazy about it, but I'm glad I did it.

Teiser: Here's an article in the Art Digest, September 1937. "George Post seen on the road to great art," and so forth. So you were really getting lots of publicity--

Post: Yes, I got some wonderful newspaper publicity. I was astounded. I don't know why I got so much good publicity, but I did.

Teiser: Was it also about 1937 you had an exhibit at the Albatross Book Shop?

Post: Yes. They had records and books and showed some paintings.

Peggy and Budd Dixon lived over the Albatross Book Shop. It was a two-story affair, and I was living in back in one of these quaint old fishermen's shacks that were in a little courtyard. Were you ever in that little courtyard?

Teiser: No.

Post: On the corner of Columbus and Jones, just below the art school there. That's all gone now. There's a big record shop there now, isn't there?

Teiser: Tower Records?

Post: That's it. It was in there where the Tower Records is now. There were three or four little fishermen's shacks in there that were converted into studios, not necessarily for artists, but for anyone. They were really awfully nice. I don't mean nice; they were a part of San Francisco, of course, that you don't see anywhere anymore.

Teiser: They were adequate, I assume?

Post: Yes. [laughter]

Travels in Mexico and Europe

Teiser: Then, was it about 1937 that you went first to Mexico and then Europe?

Post: Yes, I left in spring of 1937 and came back eleven months later.

Teiser: How did you happen to decide to do that?

Post: I'd saved $700 from this WPA project that I just told you about, going up and down the state and painting. Of course, living was so cheap in those days, I saved $700. So I thought, well,

MEXICAN CIRCUS

Post: I'm going to Mexico with two other friends. We had this old battered car, and we sailed [drove] down to Mexico. Oh, it was so much fun and so free.

Teiser: Were they artists?

Post: One of them was, yes. And after we'd been in Mexico, oh, for quite a number of months, I don't remember how many, I still had $600. I mean you lived for about fifty cents a day in Mexico in those days or a dollar, not more than a dollar, I guess a dollar would be more like it, a dollar a day. Of course we didn't stay at any fancy hotel, we stayed at little pensiones, and the Hotel Monte Carlo in Mexico City was about a dollar and a half or a dollar or something, or even less.

Anyway, I had $600 so I said to this other friend of mine, "Why don't we go down to Veracruz and find a freighter and go to Europe!" So we took the little train down from Mexico to Veracruz, and waited around till we found a ship that was going to Europe. What was the name of that ship? It isn't in there, is it? [referring to scrapbook] Anyway it was sixty dollars from Veracruz to Europe. Whether you got off at Lisbon (which was the first port) or there was one in the English Channel (the second port) or Hamburg (which was the end of the line), it was still sixty dollars. So we went to the end of the line.

So we got all the way to Hamburg for sixty dollars from Veracruz, and that's when I started that long trek down from Hamburg all through Europe to Berlin and Vienna and finally to Dubrovnik.

Teiser: War was coming on was it not?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Could you tell?

Post: Yes, it seemed Berlin was most disagreeable, not for me, but because there was all this marching through the streets. And coming right from Mexico it seemed so, oh--you know how carefree and mañana-land Mexico is, and to come to Germany where they were always marching, getting ready. It was all just military preparations. And Hitler was entertaining Mussolini, so the streets of Berlin had great banners and he had the main boulevards all repaved, had thousands of workers cutting stone to make this tremendous impression on Mussolini.

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Teiser: We lost part of the last tape. You said that Berlin was depressing, and so you were glad to get to Yugoslavia. Would you tell again the story of the young German man?

Post: While I was on the train--

Teiser: First you said--let me go back over that--that Berlin was terribly depressing. I think we got that on the tape.

Post: Well, because of all the marching of soldiers, what do you call it when they--

Teiser: Goose-stepping?

Post: Goose-step through the streets of Berlin, and Hitler trying to make such a good impression on Mussolini because he was inviting him there to see the great city of Berlin, and the armies and the strength that Berlin showed off at that time.

The main boulevards where the pageantry was taking place weren't completely repaved but I guess a lot of the big stone blocks were replaced or mended, and these great banners, poles with flags and banners waving on them. It was very impressive.

Teiser: Then you said you'd met this young German man, young boy.

Post: Yes, Gerhard the name was, Gerhard something. And he was so full of the hope of Hitler, thought he [Hitler] was a god, and I tried to tell him he wasn't, that he's misrepresenting the whole business of freedom. But Gerhard felt sure that Hitler was the only hope for Germany, and I'm sure as a young man at that time he couldn't have felt otherwise.

Teiser: You lent him some money, you said?

Post: Yes. He needed money till he got to his friend in Rome, and he said, "If I'm not there, my friend will have it for you," and months later I got to Rome--well, weeks anyway, weeks later I got to Rome, and there it was!

Teiser: How much was it?

Post: About twenty-five or thirty dollars!

Teiser: He had been unable to take money out of Germany, was that it?

Post: Right. And he needed the money to get from Dubrovnik across to Bari, in Italy, and to Rome.

Teiser: You met him not in Germany but in Dubrovnik?

Post: In Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

Teiser: You painted a lot in Yugoslavia, did you, that trip?

Post: Well, I guess just in Dubrovnik on that trip, because I was on this little, funny train.

Teiser: What did you do, go from Vienna down?

Post: From Vienna to Graz to Sarajevo and to Dubrovnik.

Teiser: Oh, you were in Sarajevo, that's right. What kind of a little town was that then?

Post: Oh, it was a beautiful little town. It had minarets. It was the first time I'd seen anything of the--what's that religion? Moslem? It had some minarets in it. It's a beautiful little city on the slopes of these hills and mountains in Yugoslavia. So I did some sketching there too. I was so enchanted with Dubrovnik, I stayed several weeks in a most attractive and modest little pensione.

Teiser: So then you went over to Bari?

Post: Yes, from Dubrovnik took a little boat. You just slept out on the deck. You didn't have a state-room or anything. Over to Bari, and that's where I first entered Italy, at Bari.

From Bari I took a train to Salerno. It was very picturesque just off the Amalfi Drive. Good for painting. And while there I had an unexpected encounter with the police. I'd been painting out in this little field in Salerno. Salerno is a nice little seaport town south of Amalfi. And I noticed all of a sudden there was a whole stream of people sort of lined up, peasants, people who lived there. They weren't near me, they were quite a distance off, but they were trying to see what I was doing. Pretty soon a policeman came by, he was an Italian police in this wonderful outfit, the red cape and saber and feather in his hat. He came bounding up and in Italian said,

Post: "What are you doing here?" I guess. That's what it sounded like. I had to gather all my stuff up, and he hauled me up to the police station which was way up high on the hill, and all these little people followed! [laughter]

I thought, "Oh, I don't know what I'm getting into here, what have I done?" I didn't think I was doing anything wrong. But anyway he hauled me up to the police station, and the chief of police wasn't in but his wife was, and she invited me in for a great big bowl of soup, wonderful homemade bean soup, until her husband got home. Then he came. He spoke English, and he wanted to know what all this was about, and he said, "Oh, it's nothing--but you should carry your passport with you. You haven't done anything wrong." It was getting dark then, and the police station was quite a ways from the Hotel Albergo Litorio; that's in Salerno where I was staying. So I had to walk back two miles in the dark to my hotel.

Teiser: They took you in because of your passport?

Post: Because I didn't have my passport with me, and when the policeman picked me up I didn't have it to show him. So I said, "Call my friend"--this was Bob Walsh whom I went with on that first trip--"at the hotel and he'll bring it, or he'll give you the number of it." Anyway, that's why I'd been hauled up to the police station, because I should have my passport with me all the time. [laughter] So that was resolved very easily. Bob just gave him the number of my passport.

Teiser: On that trip how did you know where you were going?

Post: Well, just by a map, you know. I mean you just sort of let one thing lead to another.

Teiser: You just went wherever?

Post: Yes. I saw some posters--it might have been in Berlin or Vienna. You know, just travel posters. And they were so fascinating, these posters, that I thought, "Oh, my gosh, I've got to see Dubrovnik." So that's what leads you from one place to another!

Teiser: Well, I suppose you knew you had to see Rome and Paris though, didn't you?

Post: Oh, yes. Yes, that all came later. And Venice, oh my.

NAPOLI
"UMBERTO I"

G.P.

Teiser: Did you like Vienna?

Post: Oh, I did, very much. I thought Vienna was beautiful.

Teiser: Did you stay long in Rome or in Paris.

Post: Yes, for several weeks. Gordon and Jane Herr were living in Paris, so we had some wonderful times together. Gordon Herr was an old friend of mine who I knew for many years. He and Jane Bransten, his wife, were living in Paris. I guess it was through Ann Bartlett that I heard that Jane and Gordon were in Paris. So of course I had their address. We went on some fine excursions out to Normandy and Brittany and places like that while I was in Paris, which made it very exciting and companionable.

Teiser: How did they happen to be living there?

Post: I'm trying to think why they were. I guess they just wanted to be in Paris. They were touring Europe, I expect.

Teiser: And you continued staying in very simple accommodations, I assume?

Post: Yes. They weren't too simple, but modest. I mean there was the loveliest hotel in Paris that we've gone back to many times since, the Claude Bernard. I'm trying to remember how I happened to know about it. It was on the Left Bank, right near the Sorbonne, and just a couple of blocks from Notre Dame and the heart of Paris, and it was very inexpensive and a delightful place to be. Afterwards, going back to Paris, I've always stayed at the Claude Bernard. You've been there, Ruth?

Teiser: Yes, you sent us there. We stayed there a couple of times.

How long were you gone altogether?

Post: It must have been about a year, I'd say.

Teiser: On 700 bucks!

Post: Yes. Maybe not quite a year. Eleven months, anyway.

Teiser: You were back by December of '38.

Post: Yes.

Teiser: [referring to clipping] Because it says here that you were exhibiting-- [reading] "Guthrie Courvoisier will present the odyssey paintings at an invitational preview at his Geary Street penthouse gallery next Wednesday." Your paintings of that trip. About how many did you show, do you think?

Post: Oh, maybe thirty or thirty-five. Thirty, at least I should think.

Teiser: How did you get back from Europe, Pete?

Post: After Paris I went to Antwerp, and found a freighter from Antwerp--through some little touring agent in Paris--to Quebec and Montreal. And I thought, "Gee, my father lives in Montreal and I could surprise him," so that's the way I went back.

So I came back from Antwerp to Quebec and then Montreal, and stayed with my father for about a month, and then [I took] a Greyhound bus from Montreal home.

Teiser: My word! Was that the first time you'd seen your father in many years?

Post: Well, the first time I'd ever seen him because I was only about six months old or less when my mother and father separated and he went to Canada to live.

Teiser: And you didn't remember him?

Post: No, no.

Teiser: Did you like him?

Post: Yes, yes, I thought he was such a dear person and so considerate and loving.

Teiser: He had married again?

Post: Yes, but his wife had died before I met him. He had a son by his second wife whom I met, John Root.

Return to the West Coast: Puget Sound and San Francisco

Teiser: When you came back to San Francisco you made quite a splash again with your paintings.

Post: Yes, I did.

Teiser: We went into the war in 1941. Could you tell from having been in Europe, did you have any idea that the war would come here, that we would be involved?

Post: Yes. I didn't while I was in Europe, but, let's see, where was I? Oh, I was in Tacoma in 1940 when the stirrings of war came, and I knew that, oh, President Roosevelt (who was at that time president, I think) had announced that we would have to get into the war.

Teiser: You were up at Puget Sound at some point then.

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Did you stay up there quite a while?

Post: I was there, yes, quite a bit. I was back and forth in 1940 and 1941. I met Eral Leek in San Francisco here, and we got to be very good friends. So every once in a while he'd go up to visit his mother. Oh, his father was still living when I first met Eral. While we were in Mexico his father died so he had to go back to Tacoma. Later I went back with Eral to meet his mother, and I stayed in Tacoma for a while with them. Both Eral and his mother have been most devoted friends, and later his wife Kenny.

Eral had a little sailboat called the "Gai Wench," G-a-i. It was a little schooner, and we went all over Puget Sound in it. The motor was all rusty and wouldn't work, so we unbolted it and dumped it in the Sound, and just went by sail! The tide would take us all the way down to Olympia, and it would take us maybe two days to get back! By rowing. [laughter] We had a lot of fun on that little old boat.

Then I met some friends in Seattle and started teaching a class in Seattle. I stayed in Seattle for a while. My sister Ann and her husband were living there at that time. He was an editor working for the Seattle Times. So I stayed with them in Seattle.

Teiser: Was that when you met Elizabeth Bell?

Post: Yes, yes. She was Elizabeth Harrison then. Her mother, Theodora Harrison, ran a gallery in Frederick and Nelson, a department store in Seattle, and she wanted to give me a show, to show some of my work there, that was it. So then she got a class started, and that's how I got started in the Puget Sound area. So I was away quite a bit from San Francisco, going from one place to another. You know how one thing leads to another.

Teiser: Did you keep an apartment or a studio in San Francisco?

Post: Yes, I kept my little place on Montgomery Street, sort of sublet it, but when I came back it was long gone to someone else. I'd completely lost any power over it.

Teiser: So then you had to find another place?

Post: Yes, in the old flatiron building at Columbus and Kearny [the Sentinel Building] for a few months.

Teiser: Was that when you went to Edith Street?

Post: I'm trying to remember how I got to Edith Street. I met Ann and Lincoln Bartlett who were remodeling an old Italian tenement on Telegraph Hill, and they invited me to stay with them and build a unit for myself in an undeveloped part of the building. I stayed with Ann and Lincoln a week before Pearl Harbor, that was it. So it was just at that time, when Pearl Harbor was bombed. I stayed with Ann and Lincoln on a little couch in their living room for about a month or two, and then Linc said, "Why don't we shovel out the basement so it makes a clearing there. We'll put in a cement floor and you can build a little studio for yourself there and live there. And you can built it yourself and get the materials and have it rent free until a little later." It had a fine look out on a little garden to Russian Hill.

Teiser: That was on Edith Street?

Post: Edith Street. We're up to Edith Street now!

[Interview 3: February 18, 1983]

Teiser: Last time we got you to Edith Street, but there were a couple of things that we skipped over. One was: we were talking between interviews about your Aunt Nan (Mrs. Frost's) influence. Did she have an influence actually upon your career as an artist?

Post: Yes, she was most encouraging, and encouraged me to develop and be an artist and that sort of thing, but her work didn't especially influence me.

Teiser: Her own paintings.

Post: Her own paintings, yes, which I admired very, very much, but it wasn't the sort of thing that I could interpret as my own.

Teiser: She had been to the California School of Fine Arts too, hadn't she?

Post: Yes, when it was the Mark Hopkins Institute.

Teiser: Did that influence you in wanting to go there?

Post: Oh, no, not especially. I got a scholarship to go there, that's the only reason I went. I hardly knew my Aunt Nan at the time, in the twenties. I had only seen her once or twice when I was even much younger. I had gotten away from that part of the family during my teens and twenties.

Teiser: We wanted to ask you too for a brief account of that trip down from Puget Sound to San Francisco. I've been trying not to ask you just good stories that we've heard that don't necessarily relate to your work, but you have such a feeling for boats and you paint them so often that I thought that story related in a way.

Post: Yes. It was so exciting and so much fun. I had been painting and sketching in a little shipyard, Martinac Boat Yard, in Tacoma. I had been living in Tacoma and Seattle for a year or so, and I heard that a new purse seiner, the Aurora, was coming off the ways at this little shipyard. I'd gotten to be very good friends with the superintendent at the yard, and I said I was going back to San Francisco. I had to get back because I had gotten a commission to teach that summer at Stanford University.

So he said, "Oh, the Aurora is going down at midnight. Why don't you go down on her and it won't cost you a cent? And you'll get three meals a day and there's even a case of beer in the icebox. All you have to do is take the watch--pilot the ship and take the watch.

Post: You'd be on watch for four hours and then off for eight. You'd take a rest for four hours or a sleep, and then the others--there were two others--would come and shake you up and you'd go on for four hours. You were given the direction to take and you had to stay right on the compass so you wouldn't get off the beam, of course! [laughter]

Teiser: Had you ever navigated a ship before?

Post: No, not a purse-seiner.

Teiser: Had you a bigger ship?

Post: No. That was the biggest ship I ever navigated. It was eighty-five feet long, I think. It was just a regular little West Coast purse-seiner.

We went on out of Puget Sound and through the Straits of Juan de Fuca and out into the Pacific. It took five days.

Teiser: Didn't you have a story about everybody being drunk before you started off?

Post: Oh, it was Friday when it was to leave, and it was a tradition, at least up there, for a ship on its virgin voyage to cast off on a Friday. So everyone on board was hilarious by the time I got there, I meant not hilarious but well souped up! [laughter] I got there just before midnight, and I guess they'd been carousing there all afternoon. So I thought, "Oh, what have I gotten into?" because here I was just a novice, at this sort of thing, and here all the crew--well, it wasn't much of a crew, three or four or five men--were just living it up. So I thought, "Oh, what the hell," and jumped into a bunk and thought, "Come what may!" and I went to sleep. Well, I didn't actually go to sleep because it was only a few minutes after that that we ran on a sand bank on Whidby Island, and I was thrown right out onto the floor out of my bunk.

So then I got up, and no one went to bed after that. It sobered everyone up. The crew sobered up, and we managed to pull away from the sand bank. The tide was coming in, so we sailed out of the Sound into the Pacific and down to San Francisco without any more mishaps.

Teiser: Did you have to pump all the way?

Post: Well, yes, the bilge pumps took care of it. It wasn't too serious, but it did take in some water all the way to San Francisco, and had to go in drydock when it got to San Francisco and get its bottom caulked up.

It was really an enjoyable trip. Nothing else happened of any consequence on the way down.

Teiser: Then that comes up to you teaching at Stanford. How did that happen, Pete?

Post: I was asked if I would teach a summer course in painting at Stanford for that summer, and I said, I'd be delighted to.

Teiser: That was the summer of 1940?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Did you enjoy it?

Post: Very much.

Teiser: By that time you had been giving lectures. I see from your scrapbook that you'd given lectures in museums from time to time, so you had a little experience in speaking, I guess.

Post: Yes, I'd gotten a little know-how about getting myself across--

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Teiser: You said you had some knowledge of getting across--

Post: Getting across some ideas to an audience of what my idea of painting and watercolor or any kind of painting meant to me.

Teiser: What kind of students did you have that summer at Stanford? Were they undergraduates or were they teachers or what?

Post: I don't remember, but I suppose they were undergraduates.

Teiser: You won a lot of prizes in the thirties. The first one that I saw in your scrapbook was at the Oakland Art Gallery; you got fifty bucks, in 1936. An Oakland Art Gallery prize for a painting called "Downieville."

Post: Oh, yes. Oh, I wish I still had that. Maybe I still have it down in the basement somewhere.

Teiser: I think I've seen it. Do you remember if that was your first prize?

Post: I thought it was at the San Francisco Museum, but I guess I didn't get a prize there; that was the first time I had exhibited at a major museum.

Teiser: The same year, but before that, at the San Francisco Art Association's watercolor exhibit you got the Artist's Fund Prize.

Post: Yes, that was a little boat under Fisherman's Wharf.

Teiser: A painting called "Fisherman." I wondered when I saw the title if it was a portrait, and then I looked at it and of course--it was reproduced--the fisherman is incidental, it's the boat.

Post: Yes, Artist's Fund Prize, that's right.

Teiser: Those are not purchase prizes?

Post: I think it was a purchase prize, the Artist's Fund. I think it was. I think the San Francisco Museum must have it.

Teiser: In 1939 you had a Legion of Honor show. Was that the first one-man show you'd had in a major museum?

Post: I've had four or five there. I guess that must have been the first.

Teiser: There was one in '45, and then there must have been one later.

Post: Well, in the fifties, I know. There were either four or five in all. I know there were four.

Teiser: Then you were giving lectures here and there, and [referring to papers]--on December 7, 1941 there was an article in the [San Francisco] Chronicle by Alfred Frankenstein praising an exhibit of yours at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Post: Really? Wasn't that Pearl Harbor?

Teiser: Pearl Harbor day.

Teiser: From reading his columns that mention you, I see there were lots of small exhibits then in San Francisco--maybe almost as many as there are now, do you think?

Post: Do you mean of different people?

Teiser: Yes.

Post: Yes, well, I'm sure there were.

World War II Years

Teiser: Was it much after Pearl Harbor when you started working on the waterfront?

Post: No. [thinking] I went to Fort Mason--no, first I went to the shipyards in Marin County and worked a few weeks in Kaiser shipyards in Sausalito.

Teiser: Was this just after Pearl Harbor?

Post: It was the spring of '42--after I finished building my apartment on Edith Street. After working a short while at the Marin shipyard a friend suggested that, being an artist, I would be more efficient as a cargo stowage planner at Fort Mason, in the ships that were bringing ammunition and cargo and all the food, everything to the South Pacific theater of war and to all the islands off of Japan where the battles were being fought. I can't think of the names of the islands anymore. Of course, they were in code. Nobody was supposed to know where anything went. The destinations of these liberty ships and victory ships that were bringing cargo to the South Pacific, it was all in code, so you really didn't know anything on the San Francisco waterfront, not even working on the waterfront did anyone know where they were going, nor when a convoy was going to leave San Francisco.

There was a submarine net across the Golden Gate that was supposed to hinder submarines from slipping into San Francisco Bay. So when the convoys went out, or anything came in, the submarine net had to be lowered so the ships could get through.

Teiser: My word! I don't remember that if I knew it. So you had to make charts for--

Post: Cargo stowage charts for the liberty ships and victory ships. There had to be a chart made for each ship, and it could be duplicated, but first there was an original master chart that

Post: I had to make in a little office on the wharf. I would have to go aboard with the supercargo, who directed the stowing. I would have to make a plan on this chart of where everything went. How many cases of Spam and how many cases of beans and how many of this and that.

Teiser: Did you have to know the weight of them?

Post: Yes, the weight, and its destination, which was of course in code. So the last place that the ship was going to stop at would be the first cargo that you'd put in so that it would be at the bottom of the hold. The deck stowage was the first place--

Teiser: First to be taken off.

Post: Or maybe it would all be taken off in one port, but a lot of it was destined for different stops.

Teiser: My word, that was very complex, wasn't it?

Post: Yes, you had to be awfully careful what you did. The supercargo is the man who directed the actual stowage, and what I did was just make a chart of where he stowed it. And the amount of the cargo was all in little blocks and shapes on this chart. It didn't look exactly like a ship, but it showed the plan of a ship, and it showed the front hold, and maybe two forward holds, and there's always three or four aft holds. Then the deck always held the big machinery like guns and earth-moving machinery to make airports and roads and things.

Teiser: Did you work at that every day? Did the ships come in regularly enough?

Post: When there was a big convoy going out, and there were maybe twenty-four or thirty ships that had to go out all at once, you worked maybe for two weeks without stopping.

Teiser: Eight-hour days?

Post: Yes, or even longer; it had to get out. You couldn't just quit, take a rest. You could sleep every night, but I mean you couldn't take any days off or anything.

Teiser: Then would there be a time when you didn't have anything to do and could take several days off?

Post: Oh, yes. Maybe not more than two, maybe three.

Teiser: So it was pretty steady.

Post: Yes, for several months it was, very steady.

Teiser: How long did you do that?

Post: I remained there on the waterfront for the duration of the war. I left soon after V-J Day in 1945.

Teiser: Did you get a chance to do much painting?

Post: Yes, I did a lot of sketching on the waterfront. I have several sketchbooks. I had a bicycle, and I'd go up and down the waterfront from one ship to another with my little roll of cargo charts which were about this long.

Teiser: A yard long?

Post: Oh, at least. I'll bring you one sometime. I have three or four of them at home. I'll show you what they look like.

Teiser: Good. Did you mind doing that?

Post: I loved it, it was fun. I enjoyed it very much.

Teiser: That was when you were living at Edith Street?

Post: Yes. I wasn't inducted into the war because the army thought it would be much more of an advantage to them doing what I was doing, so I felt very fortunate!

Teiser: You remember V-J Day on the waterfront?

Post: Oh, yes, I'll say.

Teiser: Did everybody get drunk then?

Post: Well, some of them did I guess. The longshoremen were always drunk. There was one supercargo that had a carton of milk, and of course we all knew it was full of whiskey! [laughter] He'd take a draft of it every once in a while.

Teiser: During the war however you seemed to have kept up a schedule of exhibiting and painting.

Post: Oh, yes, I guess I did.

Teiser: That was amazing. You had a southern California exhibit, in Laguna Beach in 1942. You showed at the Laguna Beach Art Gallery. Was that the first time you exhibited down there?

Post: Yes, and also at the San Diego Fine Arts Gallery about the same time.

Teiser: Rex Brandt at Corona del Mar, how did you happen to know him?

Post: When Rex was a student at U.C. Berkeley, he called me up and asked to meet me, when I was living at 730 Montgomery Street. He was interested in the watercolor medium and had seen and liked my work. Later he married and settled in Corona del Mar and toward the end of the forties he developed a summer art school which became very popular. He invited me to be on the faculty around 1950 and I taught there every summer for over 20 years.

Teiser: In 1946 you had an exhibit with Alexander Nepote and a man named Theodore Polos in the Rotunda Gallery at the City of Paris. Was that the first time you had exhibited there?

Post: I don't know, I had many shows at the Rotunda Gallery, when Beatrice Judd Ryan was director. It was a wonderful little gallery, that Rotunda Gallery. Beatrice Judd Ryan was so good about getting young artists of San Francisco started, when other galleries didn't bother to. She had a sort of haughty-taughty, prima donna attitude, but she was a darn fine person. She thought a lot of the younger artists of San Francisco, and she did awfully well by them.

And another advantage of the Rotunda Gallery was the fact that Normandy Lane was in the basement, and thanks to Paul Verdier, owner of the City of Paris, she had the most wonderful openings with wine and cocktails and all those wonderful hors d'oeuvres that came up from Normandy Lane in the basement. It was great fun. You were at some of those.

Teiser: Yes. The dome of the Rotunda is what's left of the old City of Paris, now, isn't it?

Post: Yes. The gallery was right under the dome.

Driving Across the United States

Teiser: Didn't you go on a trip across the country right after the war?

Post: The summer following V-J Day, 1946, a friend of mine, Elvin Fowler, got his navy discharge and had two free months before reporting back to his old job. So we decided to take a long tour of the United States to the East Coast by a northern route and back through the South. He had a '36 Ford coupe. We christened it "The Rocking Chair" because the shock absorbers were "shot" and it really bounced along. We were gone two months.

Teiser: You made a wonderful illustrated journal of that trip. It's terribly amusing. I always thought it ought to be published just as it is, reproduced just as it is.

Did you paint a lot?

Post: Oh, yes, everywhere. We had a little army tent and blow-up sleeping bags, the kind you blow into.

Teiser: For a mattress?

Post: For a mattress.

Teiser: You didn't even use a tire pump! [laughter]

Post: Oh, you could, yes. But we'd just blow them up with our lungs. And then just put them out anywhere in those days, in a field, along a railroad track, or most anywhere, and go off to sleep. No one ever bothered you or disturbed you. I don't think you can do that anywhere any more. There were not many fences then.

One spot where we camped I will not forget. It was late at night before we stopped and put our army cots out against a big hedge. It was very high, you couldn't see what was on the other side.

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Post: We heard a train whistle way, way off in the distance; you know, out in Arizona and New Mexico you hear those wonderful whistle sounds way, way, way off; it's so silent. But this time we heard one way, way off, and then pretty soon we heard it again

Post: and it seemed much closer. Pretty soon the ground started shaking, our cots started shaking like this [gesturing], it got worse and worse. And this great freight train came zooming by, almost like it was going to knock us right out of bed, and it was on the other side of this hedge. [laughter] We didn't know we were so close to the Santa Fe tracks.

Teiser: What kind of paintings did you do on that trip?

Post: I don't know what kind they were, I guess just--

Teiser: Just the kind you do.

Post: The kind of things I was always doing. I don't seem to have any sketchbooks from that trip, so I don't think I did many sketches, but I know I did some paintings on it. Quite a lot.

Teiser: Did you just drive along till you saw something you wanted to paint and stop?

Post: Yes. I know one of them is in the San Diego Museum of Art of a little street scene, mostly trees, in Vermont. I think it was Vermont. They bought that one for their collection. I think the San Diego Museum has also one from Puget Sound, "Vachon Point." But that's all in the scrapbook, I think.

Teiser: Did you sell a lot of the paintings you did on that trip?

Post: Oh, eventually, yes. I exhibited them when I got back, in September, 1946, and sold through exhibits.

III TEACHING AND PAINTING 1947-1972

Teiser: Then you started teaching at the California College of Arts and Crafts soon after the war. Nineteen forty-seven you began.

Post: Yes. I was up in Seattle and Puget Sound and down at Rex's off and on, sort of wandering back and fourth. And then I was at home on Edith Street one day when Spencer Macky came by and said, "How would you like to come over to the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland and teach." And I said, "No, thank you, I don't want any teaching." I was really adamant, I didn't want to do any more. Well, I never had done much teaching, and I didn't enjoy it too much. So I said no. But he came again, and he said, "Why don't you just try it for one year, just one year." He was one of my instructors years before at the California School of Fine Arts where I went as a student, and I always admired him. I hated to let him down, so the third time he came I said I would! He said, "Just try it for a year." So I said, "Okay," but I said, "Only two days a week." So that was fine. Tuesdays and Thursdays. A class in the morning and a class in the afternoon. And I loved it. I stayed for more than twenty years!

Teiser: That would take you to 1967, or thereabouts. That gave you some retirement pension, didn't it?

Post: Oh, yes, but it was a private school, and the pension plan was a very modest one, but I still get $61 or something from those checks. If it had been U.C. or a state university I would have gotten much more. In fact--who was the professor at U.C. who was head of the architecture department? Michael Goodman. He asked me to become a faculty member at U.C. I said no. I'd have to teach a full week, you see, like at Stanford, and I didn't want all that teaching; I'd rather be free and paint. So I turned it down, and I sometimes think I shouldn't have.

Teiser: You taught at San Jose State a couple of summers, didn't you?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: How did that go?

Post: Fine, but it was only two summers so it wasn't like confining myself to something--

Teiser: Was that every day?

Post: Yes. But that was just summer school.

Teiser: In the meantime you were painting.

Post: And exhibiting. And enjoying myself as an artist, as a painter rather than a teacher.

Teiser: I know you like to wander about a lot.

Post: I do.

Teiser: You were then selling quite a lot of paintings?

Post: I don't know that I sold quite a lot, but I sold enough to make it all worthwhile without being tied down to a nine-to-five job every day. It was free and easy and very enjoyable, but I didn't make very much money doing it. But I didn't seem interested in ever making much money until later when I started investing, and then I still didn't have to hold a job down.

Teiser: That's getting into the money game.

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Were you commissioned to make paintings?

Post: Oh, yes, occasionally, sure.

Teiser: Can you remember some of them?

Post: I don't remember exactly what they were now.

Teiser: I remember your telling of a woman who lived in Marin County.

Post: Oh, yes. Mrs. Truxton Beale from Washington, D.C., had this beautiful estate over in Marin County. And I don't know how she got in touch with me. Perhaps through the Beaux Arts Gallery or one of those little galleries on Montgomery Street. I expect they gave her my name. And she came and asked me if I would do four views of her estate. What did she call it? It was an Italian name, like one of those beautiful villas in Italy. It had a long cypress alley, and the house was very Mediterranean, a beautiful house, at the top of this long cypress alley. It looked just like something out of Italy. She asked me to do four paintings of her place there. She took me over and showed me the four sites she wanted. Of course then she left immediately for Washington, and I was to stay with the caretaker and his wife. They had an extra room there for gardeners, etc. So I stayed there for I guess a week or so doing these four paintings for which she paid twenty-five dollars each. [laughter] I thought it was great!

Teiser: This would have been in the thirties?

Post: Oh, I guess so. [still laughing]

Teiser: You got room; did you get free board?

Post: Oh, yes, with the caretaker and his wife. I thought it was a fine deal! [laughing] *

Teiser: Keeping track of paintings must be like keeping track of kittens. They go all over, don't they?

Post: [laughing] Yes, yes.

Teiser: It would be interesting to see <u>those</u> now.

Post: Wouldn't it? Well, I don't think I'd gotten into my stride as a painter then, so I suppose they weren't worth much more than twenty-five dollars apiece. [laughter]

Teiser: When you see some of your early paintings, do you feel that they were immature?

Post: Oh, yes, some of them were. Some of them occasionally I feel that I haven't done anything better today, but they were just very occasional I can tell you.

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*See also page 103 for additional recollections of commissions.

Painting Principles

Teiser: You're quoted in your scrapbook as giving a kind of general idea of how you attack a painting, how you attack the space on the paper.

Post: Oh, yes. Well, that's very important because there are an awful lot of things that you look at with your eyes that are superfluous sometimes in a composition, as a painting. So I think that you have to judge which area of the thing you're looking at is the part that will make the most interesting and exciting sort of a composition. Then there are other areas that are unnecessary or superfluous that you don't need, so you have to be aware, I think, of what to leave out and what to put in. And some areas you would--I would, at least--emphasize more, exaggerate them more than they actually are, and others diminish them, still keep them maybe in the painting, and then still others to completely obliterate.

Teiser: I can remember we were some place, and I was looking for photographs to take; I was looking with a photographer's eye. You were sitting painting, and I wondered as I approached what you were painting, because there was a great, corrugated iron shed right in front of you. It looked as if that would be what you would be painting. Then it turned out that you were painting all kinds of things the other side of the shed, and I don't think you even had that shed in it.

Post: Probably not.

Teiser: [laughing] And I thought how wonderful to be able to just see around and above.

Post: It's the same thing looking here, with you on the couch as a figure, and the couch off there, with the glass doors behind you with some distance. It would make a wonderful composition with the figure here and then going off this way, and stopping it here, and then completely obliterating that kitchen area. It would make a beautiful composition.

So if myself or another artist were to do a figure painting with this setting, I think that's what he might do; I know I would. And then use that little house as the background, but mostly the trees.

Post: Even looking the other way, facing this stairway, is so interesting, but then not making the wall quite so important, and then a little bit of the city.

Teiser: Do you think that you see things in rectangles, that you look in rectangles?

Post: Yes, very much. Some curves too, but I use mostly angles, don't I? I use some curves, but not as much as rectangles and triangles and what other kind of angles are there? Ovals I like too.

Teiser: I'm glad you said that, but what I meant was when you look at something does it compose in the space of a sheet of watercolor paper?

Post: Whatever the size of paper I'm using, whether it's square or very long and narrow or just a little postage-stamp size. Then I try to scale what I'm looking at to fit nicely into that shape or size, even if it's tiny, or a nice full-size sheet, and to scale what I'm going to compose so it fits nicely into that size piece of paper, whatever the size the paper happens to be, without crowding it in, even if the piece of paper is tiny, or cluttering it all up with a lot of uninteresting things, I mean small things. And also not making the paper so big that the composition gets lost altogether. So you scale the thing you're working on, or painting, to fit the size of the sheet that you're using.

You want a big area, a very large area, and then maybe another area that's not quite as large, not necessarily right next to it. Then you need one or two middle-sized areas, and eight or ten small, tiny areas. Then arrange them in such a way that they make an interesting pattern, a good pattern and composition.

Teiser: You sketch out the areas with pencil, do you, before you start painting?

Post: Sometimes I don't, but most of the time I do. Sometimes it's more fun just to start with a brush sort of indiscriminately and not be too decisive or sure, sort of let yourself go and work it out that way because I think you can get awfully tight and stiff by using too many pencil lines and trying to lock everything together in too definite a pattern or design.

Post: It's nice also in landscape paintings or compositions to have a window. I don't mean a house window, but have a window in the painting that becomes a look-through, so you can look through it into something beyond. I've noticed in paintings that have this window, which is--what do you call it?--an illusion, something to look through is very compelling. People like to look into something that they can look into to beyond.

Teiser: I'm looking over your shoulder now at a painting that you made in Arles.

Post: Yes, that's a look-through, only because of the trees being on one side and then all the excitement and buildings on the other. But the white especially, the light areas draw you right through to that house beyond with the orange roof on it. That's a look-through too, in a way. But some of the clues are even more obvious than that.

Teiser: It reminds me that you almost always include figures, very simplified.

Post: Yes, I think figures enhance a painting very much because a painting can look very lonely, especially a landscape. Street scenes especially can look so desolate and lonely if there aren't one or two figures in them.

Teiser: You've been known to put ducks and--

Post: Ducks and chickens. They help a lot. [laughing]

Teiser: And haven't you had pigs in some landscapes?

Post: Yes. Oh, animals are very, very enchanting.

Teiser: Chickens really are your main animal, aren't they?

Post: [laughing] Yes. Chickens, I think, are--what's the word?--homely. They're barnyard, of course, but they're also--
By homely I mean that you feel at home with them. [laughter] I don't mean that they're ugly; they're beautiful. I think chickens are beautiful!

Teiser: You don't paint dogs and cats often?

Post: I don't, do I? Well, chickens have only two legs, and dogs and cats have four. [laughter]

[Interview 4: February 27, 1983]##

Teiser: One thing I have meant to ask you about is your name, Pete. I call you Pete; most of your old friends call you Pete.

Post: There were so many Georges in the family. Ann's (my sister's) husband's name was George. George Chambers. We used to call him "Teapot," because his last name was Chambers. So he became Teapot and I became Pete! But it was Lou, my wife, who gave me the name of Pete years and years before that because she didn't think I was a George. I think that's how I really first got the name of Pete.

Teiser: I always look around when somebody says, "Oh, George," to see who they're talking to!

Post: Well, all my close friends for years have called me Pete, and today the new people I meet of course call me George because they weren't in on that early history.

Teiser: Then--these are again just picking up things--you went to Mexico a number of times.

Post: Oh, a lot of times, yes. Quite a number of times. It was easy to get to, and it was cheap. You could live for practically nothing in Mexico, and it was a beautiful country to paint in. I've always, still do, loved Mexico as a place to paint.

Teiser: What would you do, drive down?

Post: Yes. Jack Cannon had an old Maxwell or a Plymouth or something. It was a 1927 car. We went all through Mexico in it. Jack Cannon and Robert Walsh and I.

Teiser: And you just went freely?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Cannon would have taken pictures? He was a photographer.

Post: Yes, he took a lot of pictures. I have a little album that he made up for me. He died a few years ago, but he made a little album up for each of us. For Robert, himself, and me, of these pictures he took of that trip.

Teiser: One of the clippings mentions James Green going to Mexico with you once. Was he an artist too?

Post: Yes, he's head of the art department now at Principia College at Elsah, Illinois, on the Mississippi.

Teiser: And Robert Walsh, was he an artist?

Post: Yes, he was an artist. He sketched, you know. He was quite clever at sketching; he did lots of interesting Mexican groups.

Teiser: So you traveled with artists who were willing to stop and look around?

Post: Yes, it was most agreeable, very agreeable. Robert and Charlotte [Walsh] are living in Mill Valley now. Robert always has lived in Mill Valley. His mother was the postmistress in Mill Valley, and he became a landscape gardener.

Subjects for Watercolors

Teiser: Let's go on to the kind of paintings you've done. We talked a little about the subjects of your paintings. A lot of them are seascapes or seashores or boats in the water or boats beached, and landscapes. And also you did some bridges early on. There's one quite notable one of the underpinnings of the Golden Gate Bridge as it was being built, or was it the Bay Bridge?

Post: It was the Golden Gate Bridge. I did both bridges, but I think I focused more on the Golden Gate Bridge. It was easier--the position for sketching it was so good because you were up high on that bluff headland that the anchorage was constructed into. It was such a good vantage point for construction work.

Teiser: The picture that I'm speaking of (and I can find it in your sketchbook) is one that shows the steel work, and I think a critic commented upon it as a record and showing a knowledge of structure. Perhaps this ties in with your interest in architecture.

Post: Yes, I'm sure that's what it was. Anything that had to do with building or construction or architecture always drew my attention.

Teiser: At the other end is your proclivity for painting deserted old places and barns about to fall down!

MEXICO, D.F. — CHAPULTEPEC

Post: Yes, I suppose many artists have found old barns rather good material for subject matter.

Teiser: And abandoned towns or abandoned buildings.

Post: Yes. I don't know why they had to be abandoned. I suppose because there was more of a nostalgia about an abandoned place than an active city street.

Teiser: And those are an exception to your general inclusion of figures in pictures?

Post: Yes. I didn't use figures so much in earlier days because I didn't know exactly how to fit them in so they'd look like part of the composition, but I've since found out that figures work wonderfully well in both deserted areas and also in busy city streets! [laughter]

Teiser: The nostalgia, I suppose, was the point, wasn't it?

Post: Yes. Probably. I don't know, I should think that would have been a good reason for it.

Teiser: I know many of your Mother Lode paintings are buildings that once were active and had fallen into kind of picturesque disrepair.

Post: Right! [laughter]

Teiser: I picked up a couple of quotations from critics. One said, "He has something to say in his paintings." And Frankenstein once wrote, "George Post has said much of importance about the American scene." What do you think they meant?

Post: I don't know exactly, unless I was able to identify a scene or subject matter in a certain point in history or its evolvement. I don't know exactly what he meant. What do you think he meant?

Teiser: I don't know. It sounds as if they both--these were two different people--were writing that you had an idea that you wanted to express when you painted a picture.

Post: Yes, I'm sure I did, and I suppose it was--

Teiser: You do, I think, <u>still</u>.

Post: Yes. Well, I like to, as I say, identify a place with where it was and what it was, and try to get the feeling that it wasn't in Wisconsin or even a hundred miles away from where it was done.

Teiser: Yes. This is called "a sense of place," I suppose?

Post: A sense of place, that's a good way of putting it.

Teiser: A part of that, of course, is--I'm thinking for instance of your New Orleans paintings as compared to your Mother Lode paintings--selecting characteristic things to paint.

Post: Yes, again to identify it with where it was so you'd know it was New Orleans and not the Mother Lode, and identifying the Mother Lode with a characteristic that isn't like New Orleans.

Teiser: Are there differences in the light in different places?

Post: No, I think it's architecture again. It's the way a building was put together. The balconies in the Vieux Carré in New Orleans you don't find in the Mother Lode country, even though there are many balconies in the little mining towns of California. But they're not New Orleans balconies! [laughter]

Teiser: It's not that you try to express an idea that something is good or bad? You're not making judgments, I assume?

Post: Not making judgments, no, but again just identifying it as a place.

Teiser: Here's something that someone wrote. This is a 1948 article by Alexander Fried, who was the San Francisco Examiner's art critic, and it says--he's discussing beauty being in the eye of the beholder kind of--"I think more credit for courage belongs to an Irma Engel and a George Post" (in comparison with some others) "for each of them sticks to his own sincere, talented, maturely developed style and produces a fine, alive landscape, even though both of them see the tides of modern-art fashion surging daily against them."

Post: [laughing] Oh, yes!

Teiser: Do you remember that comment?

Post: Oh, yes. I felt that I was dragging along behind my contemporaries who were going ahead with abstract painting, and I never could see how abstract painting could communicate, so I sort of let it alone. I guess I really didn't understand it, what it was all about, [so] that I ignored the contemporary trend of abstraction.

Teiser: You could just as well have painted abstract paintings because you have such a strong sense of design.

Post: Yes, I admired especially--oh, I can't think of his name who had such a beautiful pattern and design in his paintings which were abstract certainly, but also you could identify it with the title of the painting. I can't think of his name. Oh, now I remember, it was Marsden Hartley.

Teiser: I remember you had a [Jean] Varda that would fit a little into that description.

Post: Yes, that would too.

Teiser: Here is a comment from a review in the San Francisco Chronicle of September 14, 1960, of an exhibit at the Legion of Honor, a review by Alfred Frankenstein.

It begins, "It is just twenty years since George Post had his first one-man show at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor." Speaking then of this exhibition, "The exhibition is retrospective, and covers Post's work throughout that twenty-year span. The change in his style across two decades is not especially marked or dramatic. What is dramatic, however, is this artist's ability to resist the trends and tides of the 'advancing edge,' and retain a fresh, vital, creative spirit. This department is not one to blow up a man as a hero for being behind the times. Post, however, insists quietly but firmly that the times encompass a great variety of approaches, including his. And he proves his point to perfection in the current show."

I remember you belonged to an organization which for a time had an unfortunate name, "The Society for Sanity in Art.

Post: Oh, yes. That developed, I think, into the Society of Western Artists which is SWA today; it's still going.

Teiser: And this group felt too, as you did, that abstract art was not going anywhere?

Post: Well, I think they were more dedicated disciples of realism, whereas I felt that abstract painting had a great deal to offer, and that you shouldn't be so closed to other types of painting. They were too much of--well, their work was just calendar art.

Teiser: Did you exhibit with them?

Post: I don't think with them, but I still do exhibit with the Society of Western Artists, which developed from that. But then of course now they're much more broad-minded than [the Society for] Sanity in Art! [laughter]

Teiser: You were often compared in the earlier years--maybe still are--with Dong Kingman, who was a contemporary of yours here, was he not?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Did you feel that that was a reasonable comparison?

Post: Well, we were both thrown together on the WPA, and I guess we sort of painted alike to start with. I don't know that we really did paint alike, but we painted in the same format, you might say.

Teiser: He wasn't a student with you, was he?

Post: No, we were just together on the WPA project, and we'd work together sometimes, and often we didn't, we just went off on our own.

Teiser: Did you ever feel that either of you influenced the other?

Post: I don't think so.

Teiser: Frankenstein, I think, at some point, compared your work with that of Burchfield. Do you think that is a valid comparison?

Post: Well, I've always admired Burchfield very much, and I suppose I sort of aimed subconsciously to paint like him because I liked his strong contrasts and his impact that he had--

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Teiser: You said you supposed that Burchfield did have a lot of influence upon the way you painted?

Post: I think he <u>did</u>, yes.

Teiser: Was he exhibited much in museums here, or did you see his--

George Post at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 1960, with one of the 61 watercolors being exhibited in a one-man show

Photograph by Ruth Teiser

George Post with one of his watercolor classes, late 1960s

Post: I saw his reproductions in art magazines mostly, although I know there was an exhibit of his, I think probably at the de Young Museum or the Legion of Honor. I'm not sure now where it was.

Teiser: Looking back over all this early period, up to say World War II, can you think of what were the major influences that enabled you to develop, or propelled you to development, however it went? Was it travel or was it study or was it whatever?

Post: I think it was just the joy of going everywhere and not staying in just one spot all the time, and recording visually the things that I found compelling and interesting, and I felt I had to record them in some way. I wasn't a writer, so I couldn't write about them, nor a poet, so I sketched them and painted them. I think that's the only influence. Is that what you asked?

Teiser: Yes, yes.

Post: Yes, that was the influence. And the urge, the urge to do it, and to record it. That's about all that did it, yes.

Teiser: I think you said that that period on WPA gave you freedom to do just that.

Post: Such an incentive it was, and as you say, the freedom just to go out and record what I saw visually which delighted me. It was a great thing. It was an incentive for many artists just starting out at that time to paint and to sketch, and that's the only way you can learn is by doing it, every day doing it, hundreds of them, even though you burn them up or throw them away, there's always one out of ten that's worth keeping, and those are the ones I turned in. But it was doing them, so many of them constantly, is what teaches you how to paint, not going to art school. Art school is a springboard to start out, but you have to do a lot of painting and experimenting on your own to really learn.

Art school is a wonderful establishment to learn to draw because it isn't so important in teaching you how to paint, but it teaches you how to draw because, at least when I went to art school, you had to have at least a year or two of just charcoal drawing from life. That's what really teaches you the freedom of drawing freehand.

California College of Arts and Crafts##

Teiser: I want to ask a little more about the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. You've spoken a little of it, and what your schedule was there, and why you stayed rather than taking another job--I think at the University of California--because you wanted time to paint.

Post: Right, yes.

Teiser: Because you wanted that much freedom. I don't know that you've indicated what a great roamer you are.

Post: [laughing] Well, I do like to be outdoors most of the time, and of course the weather is so conducive to being outdoors. It isn't like being on the East Coast where so many of the paintings are painted indoors. But there are times when it rains and storms in California too and then it's nice to paint indoors occasionally.

Teiser: But even when you're not painting, you like to be out and about, don't you?

Post: I went over to Arts and Crafts and taught two full days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays. It didn't interrupt my weekends. And you know, after being there for a few weeks I really enjoyed it, and I stayed over twenty years! And I never dreamed I'd ever do such a thing as get tied down in an art school teaching for twenty years. But you know, it was really inspiring, and the kids gave me a lot. I'm sure I gave them something too, but you'd be surprised how much I learned from the students themselves. I have never regretted going to Arts and Crafts. At first I stalled at the idea of teaching.

But I went and I have never regretted it. I got so much out of the people I met and the students that I met, and the whole thing about it was very congenial and very inspiring, really, and very worthwhile.

Most of the classes were indoors, and I asked if I could take the classes out in the field because I didn't like being inside, so I was given that privilege. So of course my class became very popular because the kids all loved to go outdoors in the field. We went all over the East Bay, the waterfront, estuary, and Berkeley hills, and just had a wonderful time. So I lasted there twenty years instead of a couple of days!

Teiser: What was your status at the art school?

Post: It was Associate Professor when I first started, but it became Professor later.

Teiser: Over the twenty years you taught there did the California College of Arts and Crafts change?

Post: Well, I didn't notice it. Imperceptibly it probably has changed somewhat, but while I was there I didn't notice it especially, no.

Teiser: Did it grow? Did classes get larger?

Post: Well, they were enormous when I first went there because--I think '47--all these guys that were in World War II had this privilege of--

Fowler: It was the GI bill.

Post: GI bill, and so I had thirty and forty in a class, and the schools were just swarming with GIs out of World War II that was given this opportunity to go to school. A lot of them went to art school whether they could draw or not because they thought, "Gee, what a smash!" or "What an easy thing this would be just to go to art school."

Teiser: Did you notice that as a group they were any different from other students, those ex-GIs?

Post: Oh, no, I don't think they were. Most of the students who came to the art school, to my classes, were just out of high school, and they didn't have any more or less talent than anyone else.

Teiser: Some people said that just after World War II that there was a kind of ferment, that there was a lot of originality in schools.

Post: There was, that's quite true. The GIs brought a lot of, as you say, original and sort of new perceptions and ideas of how to interpret something. Many of them didn't have the basics of composition or the basics of color value or things like that, but they did have a sense of translating their ideas onto paper.

Teiser: Did they see things differently then than you think the high school kids did, the people just out of high school?

Post: Oh, I don't think so. I think that anyone starting at art school--except of course there're always exceptions who are very talented without ever going to art school--but otherwise I think the students who came, whether they were GIs or not, were pretty much alike.

Teiser: When you had a really talented student, was that immediately perceivable?

Post: Oh, yes. It's pretty obvious when someone has a natural talent. You can tell immediately that it isn't something he learned or observed from outside of his own innate talent.

Teiser: What do you do with them? Do you treat them any differently than other students?

Post: Well, yes, I think I leave them more or less on their own, and not try to infringe any of my ideas into them because after you've taught a few weeks you find that you're grinding out a whole lot of GPs. So if anyone does show any talent of their own, it's better not to infringe upon their own way of looking at things.

Teiser: You said, I think (I think when we went on talking off the tape), that the California College of Arts and Crafts was oriented toward educating teachers, is that right?

Post: Yes, it was very much oriented toward teachers because it offered both a BA and a Master's degree, which the art school in San Francisco didn't. Of course, that was an incentive to go there too because once you got a BA or an MA you had a good chance of teaching almost anywhere you wanted to.

Teiser: So were a great many of your students going to be teachers?

Post: Oh, I believe half that came got good positions all over California, anywhere they wanted to go as a teacher because C.C.A.C. had a good reputation. If you had a degree from there you could be more or less in demand.

Teiser: Maybe that's why one sees so many paintings like yours! [laughing]

Post: Well, some of them did while I was teaching there, I don't suppose there are many paintings like mine any more. I suppose any student--whether he's a painter or a sculptor or a weaver or whatever he's doing, he is more or less influenced by his instructor.

Teiser: When you were teaching there was anyone else teaching watercolor too?

Post: Yes, Louis Miljorik, who also had a class in photography. I had gained somewhat of a reputation by then, and my old teacher/professor at art school, Spencer Macky, knew of the reputation I had as a watercolorist and asked me if I would come and teach a class there two days a week.

Teiser: Specifically in watercolor.

Post: Yes, that's all I really knew was watercolor.

Teiser: Well, you could have taught sketching. You could have taught drawing, couldn't you?

Post: I included that with the watercolor class. I started them out just in black and white.

Teiser: Drawing.

Post: Yes. But you do learn drawing in art school in the life classes doing models, doing nudes. That's how you really learn to draw because once you've learned how to draw the figure, you can draw almost anything. So it's a good, basic training in art school to take life drawing, and everyone is required to do that.

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IV BUILDING

Teiser: Speaking of your interest in architecture, one of the things that relates to that is the fact that you have done so much building yourself. What was your first experience with it?

Post: I think the first actual redecorating I did was an attic I lived in on North Point Street in 1930. Although it wasn't much of a carpentry job, still I took walls down and made a room much bigger than it actually had been.

Teiser: How did you know how?

Post: Well, carpentry is really very simple. I mean you know that there are joists and studding; the walls are studs and the floors are joists. You can just see how buildings are built, how they're put together. It really isn't very complicated except when you come to the plumbing and wiring, that gets a little "iffy" sometimes, but the actual carpentry work doesn't seem to me ever to have been very difficult.

Teiser: Before you took the wall down, you could find out that something was holding the ceiling up?

Post: Yes! [laughter] Yes, that's the main thing, to see where those main supports are that hold the roof from caving in; and the bracing is so important so that the wind when it hits a wall doesn't sway it because of the lack of bracing. Every wall needs to be braced against the outside pressures.

Teiser: What was your second building experience?

Post: That was up at the ranch, up in the Mother Lode country when I went to help my cousin build the little camp for my aunt who was grubstaking us to do some pocket mining on the eighty acres she owned in Shaw's Flat.

Teiser: And you said you got lumber from the high school stadium.

Post: The principal said they were going to put up a new grandstand because the old one was getting pretty rickety, but the lumber was very good, it was old redwood lumber. He said that if my cousin and I would dismantle it, we could have the lumber from it. So it was with that lumber that we built the little cabins up on Shaw's Flat for my aunt. They were just to be temporary little cabins to live in until we unearthed that pocket on the hill! My aunt wanted a beautiful stone mansion built out of the slate and stone that was on the property. It was all over, underneath and on top of the ground, so the building material was right there to use if you wanted. So the little cabins that we built from the lumber from the grandstand were supposed to be temporary, but they're still there and they became very permanent.

Teiser: How did you know how to start building a house. How did you know how to build a foundation?

Post: Well, we just got nice flat pieces of slate. First we had to decide how big the house was, then we squared it off so that there were four corners that were absolutely at right angles with each other. There's a way to do that with string and a carpenter's square. Then we put the four corners down, a big piece of slate at each corner, then squared it all off with string, then placed squares of slate about every three feet or yard which the floor would rest on. But it had to be off the ground, so the floor had to be at least six or eight inches above the ground. That meant cutting blocks of wood that rested on the slate foundations, but had to come up and make the floor level four or six inches above.

Teiser: The floors are level up there still, aren't they?

Post: Yes. None of the foundations that we put in--because they had to run through the middle of the floor--have sunk at all.

Teiser: Well, that was quite a job. Had your cousin Charlie done any building like that?

Post: I don't think so, no.

Teiser: You just made it up as--

Post: Well, it's so simple to do once you see that the floor has to be level.

Teiser: Then how did you know how to put the uprights up?

Post: You'd use string and see how high they had to come.

Teiser: But I mean how'd you know how to put the boards that held the roof on?

Post: Well, they came after the walls were up. The first thing is to get the floor absolutely level and straight, then from then on it's so simple. Once the floor is in--even just rough boards on it, usually at right angles rather than just straight across because that braces it better--then you lay one wall you put it together on the floor that you've just constructed, with two-by-fours every two feet. Then, when you've got that laid, both ends and the bottom, you push it upright and brace it temporarily with braces so it stands up straight. Does that make sense?

Teiser: Yes.

Post: I mean I don't know whether I explained it just right. Well, you do that with all four walls. Then you get all the four walls up, then it's easy enough to put the roof on.

Teiser: How do you get the roof on at a pitch so that the water doesn't stay in the middle?

Post: Because one of the walls is higher than the other.

Teiser: Okay! [laughter] That's how to build a house!

Post: Well, a shed-like house.

Teiser: Then, was it after that that you and Eral Leek built a house?

Post: Yes. Well, that house was really much more elaborate. It wasn't much bigger maybe, but it was much more refined and more elaborate than these little shed houses we built up at the camp.

Teiser: Where was it?

Post: In Tacoma.

Teiser: Was it built from scratch?

Post: Yes, yes, it was. Of course, Eral had much more experience as a carpenter than I had. He'd been building, and he also worked as an apprentice carpenter. His father was a well-known contractor and carpenter in Tacoma, so Eral really had a lot of experience about building.

Teiser: Did you learn some things from him?

Post: Oh, yes, a lot. I sure did.

Teiser: Then, was your next building project the Edith Street apartment?

Post: Yes, it was. But that was already built. All I did was--it was just an apartment that was put under the existing building which was two-stories high, but the basement was quite large.

Teiser: Didn't you have to excavate some?

Post: Yes, I had to excavate because it wasn't deep enough; the head room wasn't high enough. So we had to take quite a lot of earth out, then laid a cement floor, then started from there. But the house itself was already there, so all that was was just getting some more head room in it, and then putting in the floor and wallboard.

Teiser: I remember one side of it was against an earth bank, was it?

Post: Yes. The street side--it was underneath the street really. As you went in, the building had a nice courtyard, and you walked down a few steps to the entrance to the studio that my friend and I--the owner of the house, Lincoln Bartlett--put together.

Teiser: You had windows on one side looking out over--

Post: Yes, the open side looked out over across to Russian Hill. It had a nice little garden out that window. The bathroom was put in right on the courtyard side where it would be easy to connect with the existing plumbing. And that turned out awfully well too, although it was a very small--it was a big room with a tiny little kitchen and a tiny little bedroom at one end. At the other end was a kitchen that went off at an angle. Remember that little kitchen?

Teiser: I remember some good things that came out of it.

Post: Yes! [laughing] Well, that was fun to do, but it wasn't too difficult.

Teiser: It was a beautiful little apartment. I can say that that apartment and your house at the camp were designed with an artist's eye.

Post: That's a fact.

Teiser: And I guess you couldn't have done it any other way.

Post: Well, it was the only way I knew how to do it or felt it should have been done with what was already there to work with.

Teiser: As you stood in that basement before you started working, could you visualize the way it was going to look?

Post: Sort of, because there wasn't much you could do with it except put the windows on the side that looked out over to Russian Hill and the garden which was on someone else's property. The wall that looked out had to have two big windows in it because that was the only light that came in. The other two walls were underground.

Teiser: Well, I can think of a lot of other things that could have been done. Different kinds of windows or different division of the space.

Post: I went down to--what was that wrecking company on Third Street?

Teiser: Cleveland?

Post: Cleveland Wrecking Company, and found two big, old factory windows. I liked them because they had small panes, so it wasn't just one big sheet of glass; these two factory windows were broken up into maybe twenty-four panes, which I deplored later when I had to wash them! [laughter] But they were attractive, and I wouldn't have had just big vacant panes because the multi-pane windows looked so much better in the place where they were going than just one sheet of glass would have been.

The ceiling was the floor joists of the apartment above. There were two apartments above. This was just the basement down there. So all I did was nail the firtex to the floor joists of the apartment above. The floor joists were on the ceiling of the basement, but it was the floor of the apartment above.

Teiser: Then, your next building job, I guess, was your house on Cumberland Street, is that right?

Post: Let's see, I guess that was next.

Teiser: Perhaps in between, you and Elvin rebuilt your cabin at Shaw's Flat.

Post: Well, the little cabin at Shaw's Flat was built before I knew Elvin. My cousin Charlie and I did that.

Teiser: But didn't you later do more?

Post: Yes, we added an annex to it, that's right. Originally there was just one cabin with three little areas for garages, which were much too narrow for cars of today. This was in the 1930s. They seemed big enough then. They were never used as garages because they were too narrow really. You could get in them easy enough, but it was easy to knock the posts over too! So we never did use them as garages. Except Jim Dwyer put his car in in the winter when it was raining.

When my Aunt Nan died and left the property to her sister, my Aunt Kate, the property was then divided equally between her son, my cousin Charles, and myself. Then Charlie and his wife and mother went to Mexico. They bought property in Ajijic and decided to live down there. Charlie sold his half, and my friend Elvin decided it would be fun to buy it, it was not expensive. Then we put an annex on the cabin, and a bathroom and a kitchen.

Teiser: Were those big windows in it originally?

Post: Oh, that's the annex. Elvin and I put all that on. The front room you go into, that was the original cabin. We all had just one room. Aunt Nan had one room. Charlie and Lucille had one room. And I had one room.

Teiser: So then you put a bigger room onto it, and a bathroom and kitchen?

Post: Yes, because the only bathroom when we first went there was a one-holer off aways.

Teiser: Did you add to it when your father went to live there?

Post: No, he was there before we did anything with it, when it was the original, just one room

Teiser: I think when I first went up there--when Catherine and I went up with you--you had just made an addition to Aunt Nan's and Aunt Kate's house.

Post: Charlie did most of that. I helped him with it, but I didn't have so much to do with that. He kept adding onto it.

Teiser: I remember being fascinated by, as I think I remarked before, all this perfectly beautiful furniture in these simple houses.

Harroun: Yes, that's right.

Teiser: Then that, I guess, takes us to Cumberland Street, when you and Elvin decided to move from Edith Street and buy a house in San Francisco. Can you tell about that.

Post: Yes, we were living on Edith Street. Elvin had an upper apartment. And one day we thought, "Why do we keep paying rent all the time? We keep paying rent when we should find a house of our own." So I spent two years actually going all over San Francisco looking for a place to build or an old house to buy or a vacant lot, anything. I was very choosey because we didn't have to move. We were perfectly comfortable ensconced there on Edith Street. So I took my time.

I went all over San Francisco, and I saw places I'd never dreamed of. And one of the places was a little street I came upon accidentally, and it was Cumberland Street, up above Mission Dolores. And I thought, "Gee, what a charming little street."

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Post: There was nothing for sale on that street then. So that was out, but I remembered the name Cumberland Street. So--oh, it must have been two years later--I was looking through the want ads, which I did so often, looking for a house or something for sale, and I saw "Cumberland Street." And I thought, "Oh, I remember Cumberland Street." There was a house for sale on Cumberland Street. Well, I got into old Betsy--or whatever her name was--Blue Bel and raced out to Cumberland Street, and there was that funny little old house for sale. We grabbed it.

Teiser: Describe what it was like.

Post: Well, I don't know, it was just an ordinary little San Francisco house. It wasn't Victorian and it wasn't Queen Anne; I don't know what style you'd call if. It dated to just after the fire of '06. But it was a nice little house with a bay window in it and a front porch and two little front rooms and then a kitchen and a bedroom, and that's all there was. That was it. And a bathroom, of course.

Teiser: Up on a hill.

Post: Up on this hill, Dolores Heights it was called. It had a stunning view of San Francisco, although it wasn't near the Bay which I deplored because I loved watching the ships come in and go out.

Anyway, I decided that it was just the thing, and although it was right in the middle of San Francisco, it had a wonderful view and the street was charming. So we got it. They asked eleven thousand for it, and we got it for ten-fifty, which was a real bargain. But that was over twenty years ago! And I've never regretted it, and we did it all over and put in a fine garden, and it turned out fine.

Teiser: You certainly did it all over. As I remember, it had little rooms. I remember wondering what in the world you saw in it!

Post: Well, it was sort of tacky.

Teiser: I didn't see that, but I thought that it was not divided up very attractively. But of course again apparently you looked at it and saw it as it could be.

Post: Well, we took the whole front off, the whole front of the house. I had a contractor do most of that because it took considerable cantilevering and stuff to do, and I didn't want to be so cocksure of myself that it wouldn't stand up. [laughter]

So we took the whole front of it off, and this contractor extended the house out quite a bit further, and put an entirely new porch and stairs in. Then also put in the framework for a room in the back garden that connected with the bathroom and also had an outside entrance, because there was only one bedroom in it and we needed more than one bedroom. So that's how that house got going.

Teiser: As I remember, you got a contractor who would let you work with him?

Post: Yes. He put all the bracing and the structural work in, then later I finished it all off inside.

Teiser: Didn't you work right along with him and his men for a time?

Post: Yes. So that turned out real well, that little house. Although I had to sacrifice part of the back garden to put that extra room in, and take a beautiful little plum tree down, but it was worth it.

Teiser: Again, as I say, it seemed to me that it was your eye that made the difference.

Post: Oh, that's kind of you to say that. I suppose it was to a certain extent.

Teiser: What you did, as I recall, was put two little front rooms together into one large one, and throw the front wall out further so that that whole area then became the main living room. Is that right?

Post: Yes. And one side of the front of the house where we took the wall out became the stairway and the other side became an area for the piano, which would never have fitted into the room the way it was. And it made sort of an L-shaped room, with a corner fireplace.

Teiser: Was that the existing fireplace?

Post: Yes. I refaced it with old brick. It was yellow brick with little niches in it. And we put that Time magazine, remember, in the niche before I sealed it up! [laughter] With the date on it.

V AN ARTIST'S CAREER

[Interview 5: March 6, 1983]##

Honors, Practical Arrangements, and Workshops

Teiser: You have some initials after your name, A.W.S. What is A.W.S.?

Post: American Watercolor Society.

Teiser: I suppose you've belonged to it forever?

Post: Oh, yes, since 1953.

Teiser: You're elected to that, are you not?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Are there other societies like that that you get elected to?

Post: Well, the one here, the Society of Western Artists. And the West Coast Watercolor Society. And then I'm an honorary member of the San Diego Art Society. I was elected an honorary member of several art societies. I am also a member of the National Society for Literature and the Arts.

Teiser: I came across a quotation that I wanted to ask you about. This was again in one of your scrapbooks. You were guest of honor at the Sixteenth Annual Exhibition of Watercolors, Pastels, Drawings, and Prints. That was in 1948, October. Someone asked you about why you paint the way you do. "He says, 'For myself, when I see something that makes me happy I try to paint it so it will make others feel the same way. I think that is the main reason any artist paints.'" Would you stand by that still?

Post: Say, that's not a bad statement! [laughter]

Teiser: Almost forty years since you made it!

Post: Yes, I still agree with it, stand by it.

Teiser: Yet some of your paintings--I came across one called, "Last Cargo." Do you remember that? Did you consider that something that made you happy? Or something that said something else?

Post: As with most generalizations there are exceptions. It was like the ship sailing off, and not coming back. I don't know why I called it "The Last Cargo." I thought it was better to give it some kind of description [interpretive name] rather than just say, "Cargo Ship."

Teiser: But that seems to me--what is it?--nostalgia?

Post: Yes, it's sort of romantic nostalgia, as though maybe it was on its way to China and not coming back!

Teiser: And some of your old buildings, broken down carts, and so forth have, it seems to me, that same feeling that they're going away and not coming back.

Post: Yes. That's kind of a sad thing rather than a glad outlook, isn't it? But it is a valid viewpoint of some paintings.

I think when the painting is finished it tells you more what it should be called than if you set out to do a thing and then try to make the painting fit the title. The painting, when it's finished, usually titles itself.

Teiser: Does that imply that you don't always know how it's going to end when you start?

Post: Oh, yes, very much. It's hard to know just how a watercolor especially is going to end because there are a few technical areas in watercolor that change as you go along. It doesn't always follow what you had first in mind to do. So when it's finished, it usually explains itself much better than making an explanation and then trying to follow it in a composition.

Teiser: Do you have difficulty choosing titles for your paintings?

Post: No, they're not hard to title, once they're finished and they say something then they're easy enough to title and to put a name on them.

Teiser: Sometimes they're just descriptive, aren't they?

Post: Yes, most often they are.

Teiser: Do you title them right away?

Post: I can paint quite a number of pictures before I decide which ones I'm going to throw away or which ones I think are worth keeping. When I've decided that there are some in a stack that are worth keeping, then I title them.

Teiser: Is that the same time you mat them?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: As I recall, over the years you've matted your paintings using old posters that Julian Bagley gave you from the San Francisco Opera House!

Post: Yes, the backs of the Opera House posters which announced coming events were clear, white, virgin cardboard, and Julian just discarded them, so I asked him if I could have them to use as mats, because any that weren't soiled or torn or anything made beautiful mats.

Teiser: What have you done since Julian has left the opera?

Post: Well, I still have quite a few left. I've given up a lot of all that matting and framing because now when I sell pictures I just sell the papers, the actual watercolors, and people can mat them or frame them however they want.

Teiser: What about exhibits?

Post: The only place I really exhibit regularly is the Challis Galleries in Laguna Beach, and they've always done the matting and the framing.

Teiser: You've done your own framing?

Post: Oh, yes, I did for years, but I sort of gave that up. Most of the works I sell are on my workshops, the workshops I give. And the people just buy them, just the papers, and so I've stopped bothering with matting and framing anything anymore.

Teiser: You used to frame a lot of them?

Post: Oh, yes. I have a lot of framed ones in the basement where I store them. The whole front of the house is new, and so the basement under that part is nice and dry, so I keep a lot of framed paintings down there.

Teiser: I was just thinking back over all the things you've done. You've simultaneously painted, taught, lectured, put things together for exhibits--maybe more than those.

Post: Besides housework!

Teiser: Oh, yes, besides housework! [laughter]

Post: Washing clothes! Gardening.

Teiser: I don't know how you had time to do it, really, all that, even though you do paint fast.

Post: It doesn't seem as though I had to rush from one chore to another; it all came very relaxed and easy, without jumping from one thing to another in a frenzy.

Teiser: You've always made all your own business arrangements, too, haven't you?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: You've never had an agent?

Post: That's right, no agent. That's what I should have had years ago because I think any artist needs someone to publicize him. An agent, that's a very important thing in any profession, I think. I just never seemed to bother about doing anything about that.

Teiser: What else would an agent have done for you besides publicize you?

Post: Well, he would have probably gotten me shows in New York in places where I would never bother to do it, or know how to go about it even. Not that I feel that I've overlooked anything because I feel that I've accomplished more than I ever intended to when I started out, which isn't perhaps a great deal, but it certainly has been satisfying to me.

Exhibition and Workshops

Teiser: If you haven't exhibited in New York, it must be the only place in the United States where you haven't exhibited!

Post: Well, I have exhibited in New York, but I haven't exhibited in a private gallery. I've exhibited in--well, let's see. The Metropolitan Museum in New York gave an exhibition of American artists, on the American Watercolor Society's fiftieth anniversary, and I exhibited in that. And let's see, the Riverside Museum in New York. What other ones? I think that's all in New York.

But I've exhibited in lots of other galleries throughout the United States. San Diego Museum and Seattle Museum and Virginia Museum, Colorado, Santa Barbara. Aren't they all in the books?

Teiser: Yes, it seems to me you've exhibited in museums and galleries that almost blanket the country.

Post: Not so much in the Midwest.

Teiser: But the South, mid-South.

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Kentucky, Virginia, Texas, New Mexico.

Post: Oh, yes.

Teiser: And it seems that every crossroads in California that has a gallery you've been in.

Post: Oh, little galleries in California, there are many. In Downieville, Nevada City, Mendocino, Sacramento, Laguna.

Teiser: But it takes work to put shows together for those places, doesn't it? Don't you have to gather up a lot of paintings and get them there and often get them matted and framed?

Post: Yes, I did originally, but I keep a lot on hand and I can always change the pictures once in a while and use the same frames that the others were in. That is at the Challis Galleries in Laguna now.

Teiser: But you have to choose your pictures to send them, don't you?

Post: Well, you see, I don't do that unless I'm there teaching. See, I have classes every year in Virginia City and Mendocino and Pacific Palisades, and where else is it? Sometimes in New Orleans and in Boston.

Teiser: And when you go there to teach, you take a show, in effect?

Post: Well, I take my portfolio which is full of recent paintings. I always take newer ones, but they're not framed or matted. So if they want to keep them there for a show or anything, then usually it's easier for them to have them matted.

Teiser: I see. So a lot of these shows are in connection with your workshops or--

Post: So many of the workshops I go to I have to fly, so it would be a little difficult for me to bring glass-framed paintings on the airplane.

Teiser: Often when they arrange a workshop for you, do they ask you to bring enough paintings to exhibit?

Post: Usually, yes.

Teiser: Let me go back to these workshops, as long as they've come up. You've given workshops or classes or short lectures sometimes in many places. Some of them you've mentioned, like Mendocino.

Post: The lectures are a one-time presentation before an audience, usually a local art group. Workshops or classes run from a few days to two weeks and are mostly outdoors.

When the class starts I choose a subject and make a demonstration, and those who want to watch, watch, and those who want to just go ahead on their own are free to just start on their own because some of the students don't like to be too influenced by the instructor. But most of them do like to get a hang on how to compose a certain area or composition, so most of them watch. That doesn't mean just because I'm doing a demonstration that everyone has to watch unless they feel inclined to get some good out of it.

But most of the good that comes from these classes are not the demonstrations so much but the "crit," which is a critique which I give at the end of each class where everyone puts their paintings up, and I tell them first what I find good about them

Post: and then also what I feel could have improved them. (And many of them are excellent.) Then I ask them also to comment on pictures, and to find out what they have to say about a painting to see if they've gotten anything out of the other crits that I have given.

Teiser: The sessions you were speaking of are outdoors, generally for groups of a dozen or so?

Post: Oh, there're usually between thirty and thirty-five in the classes like Mendocino and Virginia City and Pacific Palisades. And the Hewitt paint tours. But I have a little class in San Francisco on Friday that goes throughout the year; every Friday when I'm in town we have a class. But that's just something that runs off and on through the year when the weather is good. There are usually about six or eight people in the Friday class.

Teiser: You take these people outside?

Post: Yes, we always work outside. It's very seldom that any of these classes work indoors.

Teiser: You select a place to go?

Post: For the workshops and tours we have different locations selected for each day of the week. Usually they're five days long these classes, sometimes they're ten days, but mostly they're five days. The ones with the Hewitt tours are usually ten days.

Teiser: I'd like to describe the setting which I've seen so often. You take these people out and you sit down and start painting.

Post: Well, in locations such as Mendocino and Virginia City, which are so colorful in themselves that you can sit down almost anywhere and there's something to paint.

Teiser: But you set up, and then they kind of come around and watch. They cluster around you, in effect.

Post: Oh, yes.

In Virginia City, some of them come from Reno or Carson City, and they don't always get there at 9:00 or 9:30 a.m. when the classes usually start. So I pin a little note on the door of the St. Mary's Art Center, which used to be the old county hospital till 1930 and was abandoned for years when Louise Curran

Post: asked the governor of Nevada, if she could use it as an art center, and he complied. So different people who have studied and worked there have all helped to fix it up and refurbish it. Although it doesn't have private baths, it has a bath halfway up each floor. It's two floors. It's a nice old building, and very reasonable. You can stay there overnight for very little whereas motels are more expensive.

So a lot of people come there. Most of them just stay there because it's so reasonable. But if they live in Carson City or they come up from Reno and have to drive, I always leave a note on the door where we will be painting because they can't always get there right at the beginning of the class. So anyway, it all works out very well, and everybody's happy and everyone has a good time.

Teiser: Sometimes you have given evening demonstrations, haven't you? For different art groups and organizations, in a hall or someplace?

Teiser: Oh, yes. Many times. For different art groups and organizations.

Teiser: And there you just paint and--

Post: I have an audience in an auditorium, and everybody wants to see what I'm doing because it is a demonstration while I'm talking too as I paint. But it's hard for everyone to see in a big auditorium because there might be sometimes two hundred people. Maybe not that many all the time. So some of these places have a great mirror over me so the audience can look in the mirror. Although they see it backward, still they can see what I'm doing. But otherwise I have to paint and then-- Usually my back is to them, or even if I'm facing them they can't see what I'm doing because the painting is pretty flat, on a table, it isn't upright, or the washes would all run down too fast. Then if there isn't a mirror I have to hold it up and show it to them every few minutes so they can see what's happening!

Teiser: I should bring out that you paint left-handed.

Post: I do. I <u>am</u> left-handed.

Teiser: Aren't you very nearly completely ambidextrous?

Post: Well, I learned to write with my right hand when I was in grammar school because in those days they taught you to write right-handed because you weren't supposed to be left-handed. But I'm left-handed naturally. I've learned to write and eat and do everything else right-handed except drawing and painting.

Teiser: You also can do mirror writing, can't you?

Post: Well, I can use this hand [gesturing] to write regularly, and this hand goes backward, so then you can look at it in the mirror and it looks as though you've done it this way.

Teiser: It's right-reading.

Post: Yes. But I think anyone can do that.

Teiser: Oh, no!

Post: They can't?

Teiser: It's something that a few people can do and most can't.

Post: It's a twist in the brain! [laughing]

Teiser: These workshops are all arranged by art groups?

Post: Yes, workshops are arranged in a variety of ways: by local art groups and associations like St. Mary's Art Association and the Mendocino Art Center, and such organizations as the Hewitt workshops which take painting groups all over the world.

Teiser: Do these organizations invite you?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Through the years you've taught workshops at a great many places, haven't you?

Post: Mendocino, Pacific Palisades, Corona del Mar, San Diego, Nevada City, Sonora, Palm Springs in California; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Houston, Callas, Odessa, Corpus Cristi, Kerrville, San Antonio in Texas; Seattle, Washington; Ouray, Colorado; Park City, Utah; Lake Powell, Arizona; the Hawaiian Islands. Outside the United States: Vancouver, B.C.; Guatamala; Madrid, Malaga, Segovia, Granada, Spain; Sorrento, Rome, Venice, Lake Como, Italy. At some of these locations I've painted and taught three or four times or more.*

Teiser: These workshops I think are geared mainly to amateurs, are they?

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*List tabulated by the interviewee while editing the transcript.

Post: Yes, mostly, although professionals come too. But I think at least 80 percent are amateurs.

Teiser: Are they mostly seriously interested in art?

Post: Oh yes, they're very serious about it. And there are professionals who like to be in a group. Anyway, it's more fun to work with a group than it is alone, especially if you work outdoors. And I think the main attraction is that they wouldn't go outdoors to paint unless there was a group to do it with.

Teiser: I think we were comparing this when we were discussing it long ago (and you probably don't remember it) with the Chautauqua which brought speakers into relatively out-of-the-way places to tell people things they wouldn't otherwise hear.

Post: That's a good comparison.

Teiser: These workshops bring in an artist who generally is superior to those they have locally?

Post: Locally, yes. And they have different artists that come in. They don't just depend on one artist, but there are many artists throughout the country that are well known and capable of conducting these courses.

Teiser: Are some of the people in the classes very good?

Post: Many are, but they're mostly I should think amateurs. I said about maybe 80 percent.

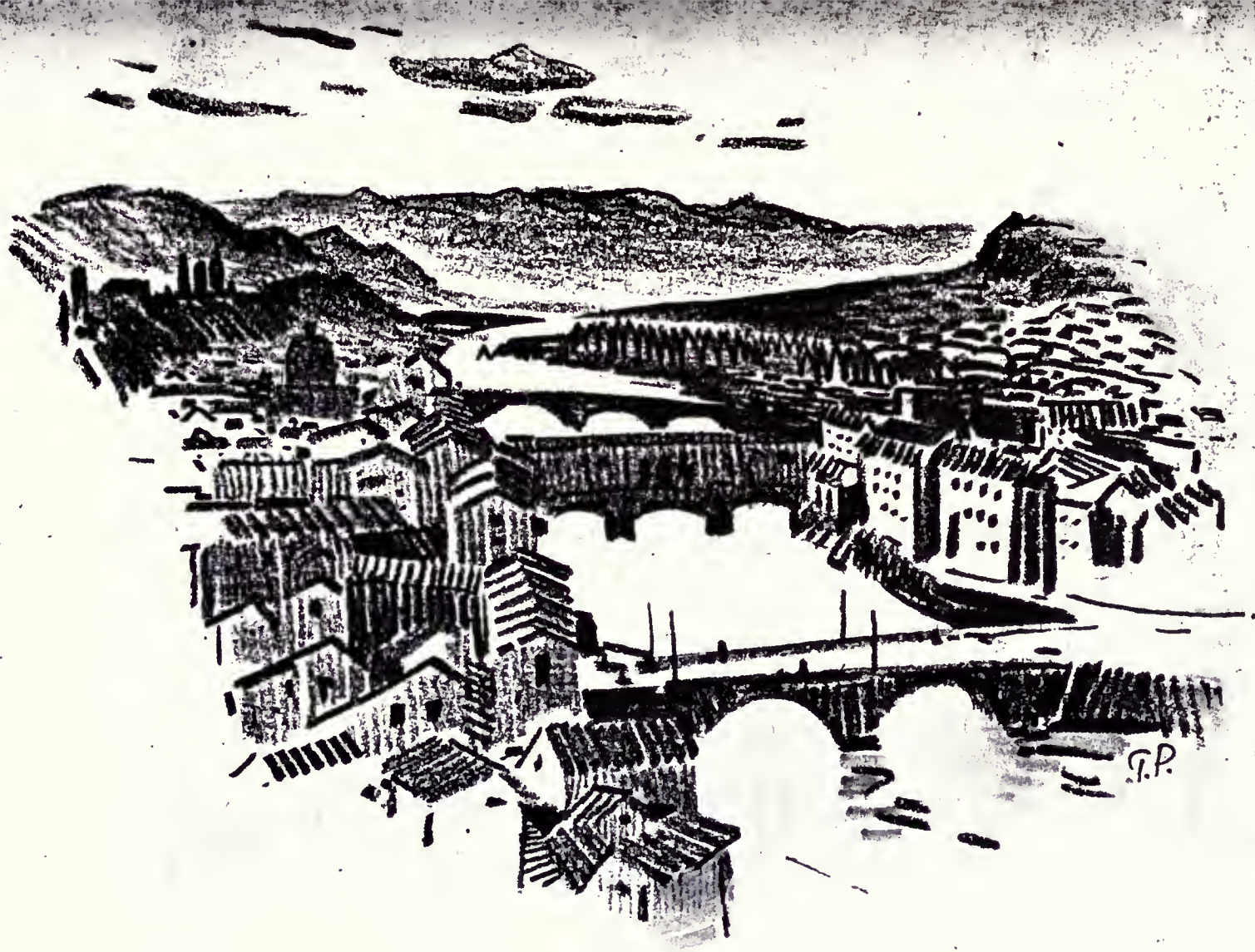
Teiser: Are they good? Do they paint well?

Post: Well, not all of them. Some of them are very good. I suppose it's what you'd find in any class, cooking or gardening. It's the same with art, isn't it? I suppose you go to find out other people's way of doing things, the way they see things, like the way they technically paint or cook.

Teiser: Do you think you leave an imprint upon them?

Post: Oh, I think so, yes, or I wouldn't be asked to come back. I must leave some kind of impression, as most instructors do.

Teiser: We often see paintings that are quite clearly by students who've studied with you or students who've studied with students who've studied with you.



ARNO RIVER

Post: That's true, and I will always feel sort of ashamed that they depend too much on what I do. I try to show them how to paint, but I'm always happy to see them interpret their own way, in their own style, rather than mine. But I suppose that isn't easy when you go to a class; you're naturally influenced by any instructor or you wouldn't go. But after they've gone a few times, then I hope that they find their own way of seeing things, which is often probably even better.

Teiser: You're speaking of a way of seeing--

Post: Or doing. Both seeing and doing, yes.

Teiser: But a way of seeing is--

Post: Is the most important. One thing I used to do is when I saw something to paint that I thought was good, and good to do, I'd really look at it very carefully for, oh, maybe two or three minutes--which is quite a long time--then I'd turn my back to it and paint it as I remembered it without looking at it because if you keep looking (I'd look back once in a while and get another point or two), but I tried not to just look at it and stare at it all the time because then you're beginning to copy, you're just copying what you're looking at rather than translating. Like you'd copy a photograph or another painting or something out of a magazine. So I trained myself not to look at it or stare at it constantly. That way I could eliminate a lot of superfluous areas in it that you'd probably use if you kept looking at it all the time!

Because the thing that makes any painting interesting and worth looking at is the simplicity in which you do it, without cluttering it all up with too much stuff. Robert E. Wood had a nice expression that he used, which is "kiss, kiss, kiss!" K-i-s-s, which meant, "keep it simple, stupid!" [laughter]

Jurying Exhibitions

Teiser: You are called upon frequently, aren't you, to jury shows?

Post: Quite often, yes. I enjoy jurying too. Let's see, what did I jury last year? There was one--the West Coast Watercolor Society--yes, in Riverside. They asked me to come down and jury the show

Post: or select, rather, select the show from color slides that people turned in. There were nine hundred, I think, from which I had to select the show.

Teiser: You were the only one?

Post: Yes. They could only show sixty. So out of nine hundred entry slides, they put three up at a time with three lanterns back of me and three screens in front of me. One, two, three. [gesturing] And they put three up at a time, or I'd never have gotten through them! The first time that they went across I could tell instantly which ones to keep, so I'd say, "Throw number two out, or throw number three out." I mean "discard." Or "hold, hold," because I wasn't sure. But then I'd go back after, to see the "hold" ones. I'd go through them again. But it was a novel and quick way of selecting a big show out of nine hundred entries. I had to throw an awful lot out, which was a shame. Then I'd, of course, go back again and I knew that some I couldn't possibly throw out, but I couldn't have them all, so I had them hold those. Then I went through all the holds again to see if maybe some I'd selected weren't as good as the ones I had them hold. I tried to be as fair as I could about it. Then after that when the show had been hung I had to go back and make the awards.

Teiser: Is that hard? Is that harder than the selection?

Post: Oh, no, I don't think it's hard. The selecting is difficult because you have so many to choose from.

Teiser: But the awards--

Post: Well, you've already selected the show of sixty, so it isn't as difficult to select the awards as it is to get sixty good ones out of nine hundred!

Teiser: Do you mind selecting from slides?

Post: No, it's a very good way, I think. But of course you have to be careful. You have to realize that some slides enhance a picture and some slides are not as good as the original. Many of the slides that you see really make a painting look better than it actually is!

Teiser: Are most shows still chosen from the paintings themselves?

Post: Oh, I expect so.

Teiser: Every year do you go to Booneville still?

Post: Oh, to do the Mendocino County show? No, they invite various artists to judge. The county shows of course aren't done with slides. They're already hung and you go there and make the awards usually. They have maybe a first, second, and third award for paintings, for pen and inks, for ceramics, for weaving, all the things you'd see in a county show.

Teiser: You don't mean that you'd select the weaving, do you?

Post: Yes, you have to select the whole shebang. You do if they only have one juror. Sometimes they'll have a juror for weaving or for other things besides painting, but usually these little county shows just have one juror that juries everything.

Teiser: You have to do the pottery and everything?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Jams and jellies?

Post: No! [laughing] No, this is just art, see. They have a different department for jams and jellies [laughter], and quilts, and chickens, hogs, pigs, cows. They have different jurors for those! [laughter]

Teiser: You're called upon to do these for local art societies too, aren't you sometimes?

Post: Yes. Oh, yes, for the Society of Western Artists and the Oakland Art Association and the Zellerbach show.

Teiser: Do they usually have more than one juror?

Post: Usually they have three, which is much fairer than one juror, I think. One juror can be so personal; I mean he's apt to pick what he likes rather than-- When there's just one juror I try to enter things that someone else might like better than I do; I don't always try to choose the things that hit me right off, but I try to choose things that a woman might enjoy rather than a man, for instance. I try not to see it just in my own light. That's why one juror is not as good as three jurors. When there's three jurors you have little buttons in your hand, a red button and a black button, and no one can see which button you're pressing. There's a juror here, and a juror here, and

Post: juror here [gesturing]. And they put these [pictures] up, and when you press the red button, it's in, or when you press the black button and it's out. You don't know what the other jurors are doing. But if three red buttons are [pressed] in it gets in naturally. If two buttons are [pressed] in it's in, but if two [black] buttons are [pressed], then it's out. If just one says in and two say out, then it doesn't get in. That's a good way of jurying, with buttons, because then the juror next to you doesn't know how you're juring. Usually there are some the jury asks to hold if they're not sure, for a later decision.

Teiser: You discuss them later?

Post: Yes, we discuss them afterward. It's good to discuss them later to determine which way they should go.

Teiser: As you think of these exhibits that you've juried over the years--and you've been doing it for a long time, at least since the fifties--thinking back over that period, do you think that the level of competence or the level of artistry has increased?

Post: Oh, I think so, yes. Oh, definitely. And California, of course, is a great region for watercolor because it is an outdoor medium, and California's weather is so conducive to outdoor painting that I suppose the best watercolor shows in America are on the West Coast, although there are watercolor shows all through America. I shouldn't say the best shows, but the most shows in watercolor are in California.

California had a new, sort of spontaneous outlook on watercolor that started in the thirties. Whereas on the East Coast, though there was a lot of watercolor being done, it was more illustration. The type of watercolor that was being done in the East at that time was more of the illustration type. Do you know what I mean by illustration? It was more for magazines and more for illustrating books and stories and such. Whereas California had hit upon a new, sort of flashy, spontaneous kind of outdoor painting that hadn't developed yet in the East, and it became known as a watercolor area more than the Eastern seaboard.

Teiser: And has that grown then? Has that tradition grown?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: Is it as strong as it was in the thirties?

Post: Maybe it's not as strong as it was when it started because it sort of just rolls along now, having had a good start. But the western style of painting caught on, and people really took to it.

Teiser: Are there more groups, more watercolor and other art societies now?

Post: Oh, many, many more, I think so, yes, throughout America.

Teiser: Do you think it has anything to do with the economic level of the country, giving a lot of people leisure?

Post: Yes, I imagine that did have a lot to do with it, and it gave a lot of people something to do and something to look forward to, get out and get some fresh air! [laughter]

Who Buys Post Watercolors?

Teiser: As you have gone about to these various places teaching, you have sold a good many paintings, is that right?

Post: You do at these workshops, yes. A lot of people that come to them like to have something that the instructor has done.

Teiser: I should ask about the major holdings of your paintings. Are there some people or organizations that have large numbers--

Post: Collectors, you mean?

Teiser: Yes, collectors.

Post: Oh, yes. A lot of people have collected my work.

Teiser: Who are they?

Post: Well, they're different people who have come to my classes. And museums too, of course. Most of the museums, though, don't have a collection, they have maybe one or two, but they don't have great numbers. Let's see, the San Diego Museum has two or three, and the Frye Museum has a couple I'm sure in Seattle. And the Seattle Art Museum has I know one or two, maybe three,

Post: I've forgotten. And the Legion of Honor has two. The San Francisco Museum has one or two. But they don't have a lot. They don't have big collections like private owned people have.*

Teiser: Who are the private collectors who own paintings? Isn't there a doctor in Texas, for instance?

Post: Yes, Dr. McMullen. Faber McMullen has, oh, I guess, maybe a dozen, maybe two dozen now. He has a big hospital in Houston, the Hermann Medical Center. It's on Hermann Street. He has them all over the hospital and his offices. He's bought many. He and his partner must have thirty or forty of my paintings. But most of my paintings aren't in big collections. Gene Crain, a lawyer in Laguna Beach, has six or more and Helen Zilgitt of Laguna Beach bought quite a number.

Teiser: Do you often sell the paintings that you do while the classes are with you?

Post: Quite often, yes.

Teiser: I should think they'd like to see what is done. We've been speaking mostly of art society classes, but there's also Rex Brandt's school.

Post: Well, he had a wonderful school down in Corona del Mar, and he invited different artists to come as guest instructors from time to time.

Teiser: He himself is an artist.

Post: Yes, oh, a very fine artist. But he liked also to give his classes other viewpoints besides his own, so he asked different artists to come at different times during the summer as guest instructors. They were usually two-week periods. I'm trying to remember the different artists that he had. There were Phil Dike and Robert E. Wood. Rex's wife, Joan Irving, was on the faculty. There were just three or four altogether that he invited to come to his summer classes.

Teiser: There are social aspects, aren't there, to that?

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*For list of museums holding George Post's paintings, see Appendix A.

Post: Yes.

Teiser: You're all together a great deal, aren't you, during those periods?

Post: Yes, most of the time.

Teiser: It must be very nice for students to get to know instructors.

Post: Yes it is, in Virginia City for instance, everyone sort of lives together in the big old brick building that used to be the county hospital, years ago, which is different from Rex Brandt's classes. He holds them in his home, and people have to find residence elsewhere.

Teiser: Can you characterize Rex Brandt's kind of painting?

Post: Well, it's very wet and loose and watercolory. Sometimes it is a little too literal, but he also has done a lot of interesting abstract things too. Not abstract in the way that it's all angles and curves, but abstract in a literal way, that it's not literal and yet it's--I mean you can see things in it that you can recognize, not recognize so much as identify with. He has a nice way of painting in different ways, so that it isn't hidebound.

Illustrations and Other Commissions

Teiser: You were speaking of illustrative painting. You've done some very successful illustrations, as I recall, for Fortune--

Post: Fortune and Westways. I did two covers for Westways.

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Post: Fortune sent me to Portland, Oregon, to do an illustration for a story, "Ports of the Pacific" in 1945.* It was Portland Harbor with Mt. Hood in the distance and a big battleship in the foreground. It had to do with the war in the Pacific. I have it at home. Isn't it in the scrapbook?

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*It appeared in the issue of February 1945.

Teiser: Yes, there's a whole series.

Post: Others in Fortune were of Mojave Desert, Puget Sound, San Juan Valley, San Francisco Bay Bridge, and some WACs,a nurse and a sailor. Dong Kingman did some too, I think.

Teiser: Also you did a number of pictures for Ford Times.

Post: Those were mostly restaurants, but one was a beach. That beach down at Santa Cruz where the old cement boat was. Fort Times had a good one on Weaverville, too. There were seven illustrations in that one, of Weaverville, called Shangri-la America. A story by Frank Cameron. They were of the old joss house and the winery and the circular stairways that were along the main street. Remember those three circular stairways that went up from the sidewalk up to the balcony? There were three of them in Weaverville. They're still there. They're very charming. And the background is wonderful of the Trinity Alps.

Teiser: When you approach a job like that, do you approach it very differently than you approach paintings that you do on your own?

Post: No, they're the same. Practically. I mean I don't change my style much, whether it's for a magazine or it's for a gallery or whatever, I still have the same outlook. When I first started I was a little wary of commissions because I always felt I had to do it the way they wanted it rather than the way I wanted it, but I got over that!

Teiser: Well, clearly, after people got to know you and asked you to do commissions they wanted things done the way you wanted it, is that it?

Post: Yes. Did I tell you about those four watercolors I did for Mrs. Truxton Beale?

Teiser: Yes.* [laughter]

Post: Of course, I was restrained because it was a commission, and I felt that she didn't know whether my work was any good or not. She must have seen something at one of the galleries here, or the Legion of Honor, or the San Francisco Museum, or she wouldn't have come to me to ask me to do these things. But I felt restrained at that time (it was many years ago) and I felt I

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*See page 63.

Post: should do them without the freedom that I would have done if I'd just done them on my own because I wanted to do them rather than what somebody else wanted me to do. I guess that's about it.

Teiser: I remember once you had a commission that you accepted with, I think, not complete enthusiasm; I don't know why you accepted it. You painted a portrait of someone's dog!

Post: Oh, yes! [burst of laughter] Well, it was such a cute little dog, and I really sort of enjoyed doing it because I liked the dog so much. It was a little fluffy thing with hair over his eyes, and you could hardly see his eyes. But he was so appealing. I enjoyed doing that! [laughter] I didn't at first. I didn't want to especially do a dog, but I thought that when you see something that's so enjoyable that it's fun to do, and he was a cute little dog.

Teiser: I remember that's your only portrait!

Post: Yes! [laughing]

Teiser: Except the one of Catherine [Harroun].

Post: Yes. Gee, I hope you get that on tape.

Teiser: Oh, yes. You did that just after Grumbacher sent you on a tour. Tell about that Grumbacher tour.

Post: Well, I'd rather not. But I will--[laughter] Grumbacher in New York was pushing casein. This guy came out from New York. I think maybe he had other painters doing things too, but anyway he put me on casein, which was a forerunner of acrylic, what they use today. When it dried it was sort of whiteish and milky. It was a terrible medium to use. But anyway, I went around and did quite a number of casein paintings for him.

Teiser: You gave demonstrations of painting with that?

Post: Yes, up and down the West Coast. That was more of a lecture demonstration, and people could come and see how casein was done. It was mostly around California. I remember Santa Cruz was one of the places I went.

Teiser: Did you do Catherine's portrait in casein?

Post: Yes.

Harroun: I think he did.

Post: I did. It's the only one we have left! [laughter]

Teiser: I think I should explain that this was the result of a joke. Catherine and I had been asked to give our pictures to a magazine editor for possible use in the magazine since we were writing for it, and we thought that was silly. So we took pictures of ourselves in a curved mirror and you saw Catherine's and so you painted Catherine's portrait from that mirror photograph! [laughter]

Harroun: It's a wonderful painting.

Traveling Further Afield

Teiser: That brings us to more recent travels. Let me remind you that I think Pan Am in 1962 was the first group tour that you led as a painter.

Post: Yes, I think that was the first time I went to Europe on a painting tour. I mean I'd been to Europe before but not with a group.

Teiser: Isn't that the one? [referring to papers]

Post: It was with the Oakland Art Association. Well, this was great fun. [looking at papers] Amsterdam, Paris, Milan, Florence, Rome, and London. Oh, what a break! It was terrific!

Teiser: Then the next time you went abroad was on the round-the-world trip in '68 and '69?

Post: Yes, I had a sabbatical coming [from the California College of Arts and Crafts], that was it. So a friend and I decided to go around the world. We just started out without knowing from one place to another where we were going. We took a little Taiwan ship, the Oriental Jade, from San Francisco to Yokohama and spent about two months in Japan. Japan I think is one of the most fascinating and delightful lands of all. With the exception of Tokyo (which is much too big and overcrowded) it is like a lovely garden. The little farms are neat and well cared for. The pagodas are great, their pillars a stunning vermillion red, with handsome layers of tiled roofs diminishing in size as they go up

G.P.
TOKYO

Post: four or five above each other. The temple gardens too, are a work of art, always with a lake and bridges for reflecting and beautifully landscaped. The homes are simple wood and plaster with thatched roofs or shingles. Truly a modest but breathtakingly beautiful country.

We went to Taiwan too. We flew from Japan to Taiwan, and then from Taiwan to Hong Kong. Then we took a ship from Hong Kong down to Bangkok and Singapore to Ceylon. Then at Ceylon we flew to Madras up to Nepal, Kathmandu, and then to New Delhi. Kathmandu is a place everyone should see.

Now, where did we go after New Delhi? To Beirut, Cairo, then to Istanbul, that was it, Alexandria, Athens, Rome, up through Europe, Florence, Venice, Milan, Paris, London.

Teiser: You've been to Spain and Portugal since, too, haven't you?

Post: Yes, that's right, with Thurman [Hewitt], on one of Thurman's tours, that's right. That wasn't on this trip. On this trip we took a ship from Amsterdam across the Atlantic through the Canal right to San Francisco.

Teiser: I see that that trip lasted from August '68 to July '69. And you painted and sketched all the way?

Post: Yes.

Teiser: You probably had lots of incidents, but you had an incident I know in Egypt; you were arrested or at least detained.

Post: Oh, of course! and that was scary!

Teiser: That had to do with your painting. Tell about that.

Post: Well, I was painting in Cairo, apparently at the wrong place. I was in front of this great massive building, but I wasn't painting it, I was doing something across the street, with a nice little facade, a little building that was probably stored with ammunition which I didn't know! [laughter] A gang of men, not in uniform, just plain-clothes Egyptian fellows, came clamoring up and started yelling and screaming. [I thought] "Oh my word, what's wrong now?" Anyway, they hauled me into this big building that I was next to, and in the meantime Elvin, my friend, had gone off because he never stayed around with me when I was painting.

Post: He went off sightseeing on his own. And when he came back I was gone. He didn't know where I was. I was in this big building being interrogated: What was I doing out there, anyway?

So my friend didn't know where I was. But there was a man out there, a native, an Egyptian; he sensed that this man, who was Elvin, was wondering where I was. I mean somehow he connected a relationship because Elvin wasn't with me while I was painting. He said, "I think he--" He pointed into this big building, and Elvin went up there and found me in there surrounded by all these high brass officials, a great bunch of people around.

So anyway they talked English and told me they would have to hold my sketchbook, in which I had been doing many scenes in and around Cairo, until they completed an investigation. I had to come back and report, each day, and I'd be sent from one office to another. We were going to go down the Nile, and we had to postpone it because every time I went to one official he'd pass the buck and say, "Well, day after tomorrow you go see someone else." So the next day after that I'd go to see someone else; I kept going. It just ruined that whole itinerary. We had to skip the Nile trip because I was so long being interrogated by all these different guys. It was all so silly, I mean it didn't amount to a row of beans, none of it.

Teiser: You were in an area that they felt was sensitive?

Post: They thought I might be a spy just posing as an artist doing these sketches. They had kept my sketchbook which I sorely hated to lose, and I couldn't get it back. And the last day I thought, "Well, I don't know what to do." They said they'd send it to me, they'd have to go through it all very carefully. They were really concerned about this because I could have been a spy, you know, posing as an innocent artist. So I don't know how many people went through this book, but they said they might send it to me, to San Francisco, but they really had to go through it thoroughly.

Well, anyway, this was two or three days before we had to leave because we had our tickets, you see.

Teiser: Were they holding your passport?

Post: No, just the sketchbook.

Teiser: I think you thought you were being watched all the time.

Post: Yes. Anyway the day before we left, the concierge, the lady in the hotel we were staying at, said that two little men in dark clothes came up and left the book on the desk for you, and it was my sketchbook!

Oh, I was never so glad to see anything. They just left it without saying who they were. So anyway I got it before I left Cairo.

[doorbell rings] There's El. [Elvin Fowler comes in.]

Teiser: This is now going to be Elvin Fowler, who was with George Post in Cairo. The authorities didn't hold George's passport?

Fowler: No, they held his sketchbook. He didn't have his passport with him when he was picked up. He said it was at the hotel. So they delegated two aides to go with us in a car back to the hotel where they then checked the passport; they didn't take it, they just checked the identity and so on.

Teiser: But you were very uncomfortable for the rest of your stay there?

Fowler: Yes, because we were subject to interrogations several times. We couldn't leave the city because they made appointments for us to come and have questions again.

Post: Well, they kept passing the buck from one man to another. Remember, we had to go to see all these different guys, officials?

Fowler: Yes, it was a kind of harassment. He'd tell the whole story to someone who would then say, "Well, this is not under my jurisdiction, so go see this other guy." And you'd be introduced and you'd get a little cup of coffee, and then this new man would say, "Now, would you start from scratch and tell me the whole story again." [laughing] And so it was trying. And particularly when we went to the American consular service and they said, "We're sorry; we're persona non grata here. We can't help--"

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Teiser: You found the American Embassy, you said, in the--

Post: Basement of the Spanish Embassy! [laughter]

Fowler: And he said, "I can't do anything for you. You might try the Cairo Tourist Police that was supposed to be of some assistance to tourists who got into difficulties. And that was an entirely different address. We finally found that, and after telling the story, they said, "Oh, no, we can't take up that kind of a problem. There's nothing we can do for you." [laughing] So we just got no help anywhere.

Teiser: But you finally got the sketchbook back.

Fowler: After the end of the last interview, they said, "Well, we'll have to consider what decision we will make." And we didn't know what the decision was. The implication was that they might mail the sketchbook back to our San Francisco address, they didn't want us carrying it around with us maybe. But unannounced--maybe this is already covered, I don't know--a man did show up.

Post: At the last minute.

Fowler: Yes. At the hotel, and left it without a word.

Teiser: I think that you and Pete said that you felt you were being watched all in this time.

Fowler: Well, of course we didn't know. We felt that they were doing a lot of checking behind the scenes, who we were and why we were there.

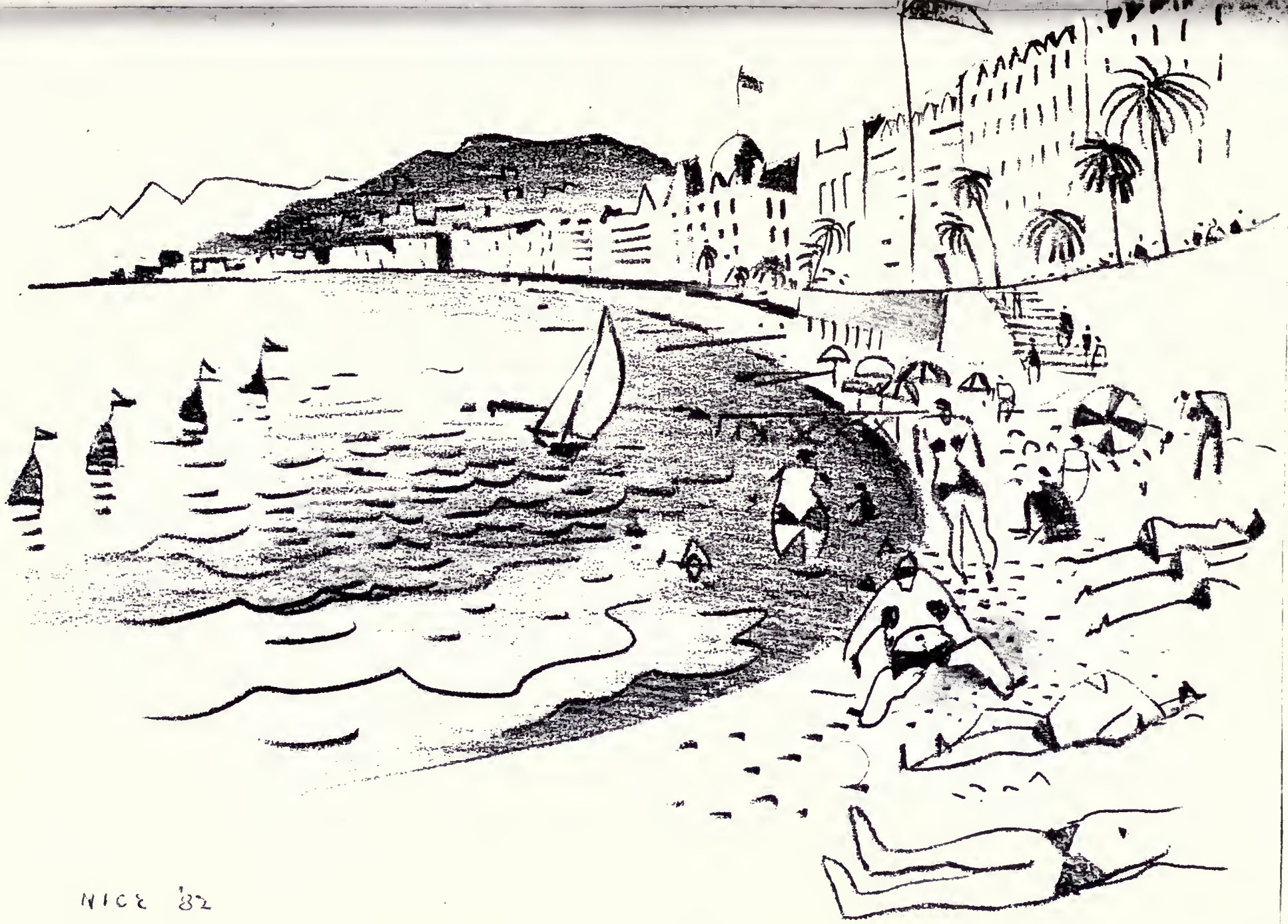
Teiser: I suppose it was not unreasonable, considering.

Fowler: No, they had reason, I think, to be pretty well scared. They showed it [their fear] all around the city in the obvious batch of soldiers all around the bridges. The soldiers all had guns in their hands with bayonets on them. And all the major buildings were sandbagged in the front of the building. They didn't know what kind of internal problem might show up, so they were being very cautious at that point.

Teiser: Did you come to Rome, where you met us, directly from there?

Fowler: No, we went to Istanbul and stayed there for a week or so.

Teiser: My, what a trip. Pete, did you feel after that trip--you'd traveled a great deal before that--did you feel that that trip changed anything?


NICE '82
J.P.

Post: Change anything, how do you mean?

Teiser: Well, did it change your vision or anything about the way you worked or anything, or was it just one in a series?

Post: Oh, no, it was just another trip with maybe a few different circumstances, that's all. No, I enjoyed the whole business and the sometimes insecurity we felt. It was always very exciting.

Teiser: Did you come back to teaching then quite refreshed?

Post: Oh, very much so because it gave me my first impression and vision of the Orient. I'd been to Europe a number of times, through most of western Europe, but I'd never been to the Orient. So this was a real thrill. Especially Japan, it is such a beautiful country. I had no idea that Japan was so colorful and so conducive to painting.

Hewitt Workshops##

[Interview 6: March 27, 1983]

Teiser: Summers you went out from that sort of academic milieu into the field and did workshops, and it was quite different.

Post: Oh, yes. I had been teaching for years, one week a year, at Virginia City and one week a year at Mendocino Art Center, usually in June or July and a few weeks at Rex Brandt's summer school.

Then Thurman Hewitt started these watercolor painting workshops with different painters, and took the groups overseas and all over the United States.

Teiser: How did he start that?

Post: He lived in Houston, Texas, and he started taking a little group of architects. He took a group of architects to Mexico by train. He got a class together and they had a good time, and they painted in Mexico. I guess he did that maybe a time or two and found that there was an interest and a chance to expand that kind of thing. He moved to Mexico City, and he lived there for a number of years, and had classes come down there.

Post: I think his first teacher was Dong Kingman, an old friend, they joined together. He had Dong Kingman come and teach in Mexico a number of times, and this expanded, and he added other members to the faculty, you might say. He expanded this work, and then eventually it became full-time for him, and he came up to San Francisco to live. He developed the techniques of getting mailing lists, putting out brochures, getting good locations, good hotels, and he put on very fine workshops.

Teiser: When did you start, Pete? What was your first Hewitt workshop?

Post: I think '71 was my first one with Thurman.

Teiser: Where did you go for the first one?

Post: Well, the first few years we always went to Mexico and Guatemala. The first year with Thurman was Ajijic, in Mexico. And then there was--what was that beautiful town in Guatemala?

Fowler: Guatemala City.

Post: No.

Fowler: That was one stop.

Post Where the volcanoes were. Lake Atitlan and there was that beautiful little village--

Fowler: Antigua?

Post: Antigua, yes, in Guatemala. It was a beautiful little city for painting. Then Thurman decided that it was time to go to Spain and to Italy. So I've had some wonderful trips. Lake Como and Venice in Italy was a great workshop.

Fowler: And Sorrento.

Post: Sorrento is the greatest.

Teiser: Do you prefer painting in southern countries?

Post: I love the Mediterranean for painting, the African side--Algiers and Cairo are fine--but the northern shore of the Mediterranean is so full of interest because Spain and France and Italy and Greece are all along the Mediterranean. So full of historical lore and fascinating people and color.

SANTO DOMINGO
MEXICO CITY

Teiser: What is the function of the artist on a Hewitt tour? What are you called upon to do?

Post: Oh, you mean for the instructor?

Teiser: Yes.

Post: Well, I guess he leaves that a lot up to the instructor, but I always would give a demonstration first thing in the morning, and those of the students who wanted to watch always did. And those who wanted to be more or less on their own, just went off and started a painting of their own, without being influenced by what I decided to paint or how I painted it. But so many of the students are eager to see how a painting is started and how it evolves from a sketch into a watercolor. So I always had plenty of the students watching me as I painted.

Teiser: How did you find a place to paint when you were away in a foreign city?

Post: Thurman and I would usually get there at least two days before the classes started, so we'd go scouting and looking around for interesting spots. And also when I have other classes of my own, like in Albuquerque or, let's see, where else did we paint? Oh, San Antonio or Corpus Christi and Kerrville in Texas, in the hill country. I'd usually get there a day or two early, and whoever was putting the class together in these communities would go along and we'd decide on a good spot for the class to meet. Or usually the first day or two we'd just paint in the studio so the students could get acclimated to what they were supposed to do or how to get started. Just going outdoors and painting all of a sudden is often much too overwhelming or complicated for a beginner, so it's better to start in a classroom.

Teiser: Well, this wasn't always true of the Hewitt workshops though, was it?

Post: No, you see, most of the students in the Hewitt workshops are professional artists, more or less, already.

Teiser: That was what I was going to ask, what the character of the Hewitt groups are?

Post: They've all pretty much been doing it. They may not be teachers themselves, although many of them are. The attraction of the Hewitt workshops is that Mr. Hewitt scouts all these interesting

Post: spots all over the world, mostly Europe and China and Japan. The main attraction is that he puts these together, and finds the most comfortable hotel. And although the price of these Hewitt workships is quite expensive, still it's worth it because everything is paid for before you start. So everything has been taken care of. Mr. Hewitt may scout a place a year before he decides to have a workshop there to see that everything is right and hotels are available.

Fowler: I think you should add, or someone should add, that a big attraction for a Hewitt workshop is that he's careful to have a very good faculty of top watercolor painters of the country. So the people who sign up know they're going to be given instruction by top pepple--

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Teiser: They're always watercolorists?

Fowler: Always watercolorists.

Teiser: I see.

Fowler: That's a big draw.

Post: Yes, I think it's an attraction that invites them to go on a tour that's all prepared for them and comfortable, and you meet people on these tours and they all have a lot in common with each other because they do paint, although some of them may not always paint in watercolor, still watercolor is the prime objective. If you want to paint in oil or in acrylics or pastels, you can. It's not limited just to watercolor necessarily, but usually nine persons out of ten will paint in watercolor.

Teiser: The kinds of people who take these workshops, some of them are advanced amateurs, would you call them?

Post: [to Fowler] Would you call them advanced amateurs?

Fowler: Yes, yes. They have considerable experience. They may be as good as some professionals, but it's an avocation.

Post: Rather than a profession.

Fowler: Some of them are quite good.

Post: Yes. Excellent.

Teiser: Are there also some people who are pretty punk?

Post: Oh, a few! [laughter] But they enjoy it.

Teiser: To get back to your functions as the instructor, you first then start out with a demonstration that they can watch or not. Then what?

Post: They are usually eager to watch the demonstration to see what my particular interpretation might be of a particular subject. So I'll do a demonstration, and many of them will watch, even though they may be very proficient artists themselves. But it's always good to see how some other professional painter will handle a subject. So I make a demonstration, and nine out of ten of the students will watch very intently.

Then they go off. They'll either do what I did or they decide that they'd rather tackle a subject that's quite different or in another direction. But so many of them are so uncertain and so unknowledgeable about how to get started, that it's good to go around and help each one. They can't seem to make headway at first,they just sort of [are] thinking about it, or they put a line here maybe, and don't know how to follow through with it. So that's when I give them help, when they need it.

A few of them would rather just be on their own and not have any interruption or influence from what I do which is the best thing of all. But there are always some that are sort of floundering, they don't seem to know how to get started, so I go around and get them started.

"Here [quoting himself in a class], first break up your composition so that you get three or four different areas or shapes in the painting. A big area, and two or three middle-sized areas, and a small area. And then arrange these areas so that it fits the subject that you're going to paint."

But after they've gotten started, and the paintings are being painted, and finally finished after maybe an hour, two hours, or sometimes even three hours, we put them all up together in a row, and this is time for the crit--the most important part.

Post: Then I'll go through each one, and I'll usually start and say what the good parts are and why it works so well, and then I go through the same painting and tell them how it might even have been better, how it might have been improved.

And they seem to get more out of that final crit than almost anything, certainly more than even watching me do a demonstration. Because here they see, say, twenty-five or thirty paintings all up in a row, of more or less the same subject (I guess two-thirds of them at least are of the same subject), they can see how another person handled it.

Teiser: In a workshop like this, how many sessions are there generally? How many days do you paint?

Post: Usually they're a week, five days, sometimes they're ten days, but usually they're just five days.

Teiser: Of painting.

Post: Yes, every day. We usually start around 9:30 a.m., I guess, and work until the crit by 2:30 p.m. We usually finish by 3:00 or 3:30 p.m.

Teiser: Do the same people keep coming back?

Post: Quite a few of the same ones keep coming back to the Hewitt tours, yes. Also the Virginia City and Mendocino groups, and the Pacific Palisades group, but there are always some new ones.

Teiser: Are they the same mix of people, of teachers--

Post: No, not so many teachers in those groups, although maybe two or three might be teachers, teaching in the high schools around the state.

Teiser: What are most of them then?

Post: Housewives.

Teiser: Someone once made a derogatory remark to you about Sunday painters and you stood up for Sunday painters very effectively.

Post: Everyone, I guess, has a sort of a yen to paint because it's a way of expressing yourself, like writing a poem or playing the piano or the violin, isn't it? It's a form of expression, and so many people like to give vent to their expressions.

Teiser: I think years ago you were discussing the fact that workshops bring a kind of national level of culture to remote places.

Post: That's a very good observation, yes.

Teiser: Well, you made it. I'm just paraphrasing it. Can you speak a little about that?

Post: I don't know how many different instructors of any merit come to Kerrville, Texas, for instance, to teach, but I'm sure there are three or four others beside myself. I don't know how I got interested in Kerrville, except that I met some very nice people and interesting people since I first went to Kerrville. But I'm trying to remember what instigated me to go to Kerrville in the first place, unless someone wrote to me.

Fowler: Two of the women that were on Thurman [Hewitt] workshops that were from that area wanted you to go there. Polly Howerton and Win Oliver had been on a number of Hewitt workshops, and Win lived in Kerrville, and she knew there was one of those little art centers--oh, like Mendocino Art Center, remote, but still active--and she asked George if he'd be willing to come there to do one of their workshops.

It's just outside, about five miles from Kerrville. It's even smaller than Kerrville, but there's a big summer colony that goes there; it's one of the prettiest parts of Texas. People come there from all over.

Post: It's called the hill country.

Fowler: Hill Country Art Center. They have a little theater group, and various kinds of arts and crafts are taught there all summer to different groups. It's like Mendocino. It's great that so many of these remote areas have active art centers or culture centers, and they bring artists and craftspeople from many areas that come to these little places, and there's a lot of interest. They have a lot of painters who come to the classes. Like Sonora [California]. Sonora isn't right in the center of things, but he always has a few that will come there for a class, if he has a class [referring to Post]. A lot of these are local people. They may be Sunday painters but this is an important outlet for them. And I think that's very stimulating, and this must go on all over the country.

Teiser: Since you retired from art school in 1972, you've been painting and doing more workshops and more private, small classes?

Post: I don't know that I've been doing many more than I always did, except maybe the Hewitt classes.

Fowler: Well, you're freer to do it over a longer period. You see, this year he starts doing a workshop in April, and the last workshop scheduled so far is past the middle of October. Before he retired, the workshops were in the summer when Arts and Crafts was not in session. So this means he has more time and can go more places, like we've been to Miami, and Pensacola, Florida.

Post: Ouray, Colorado!

Fowler: So it can be spread out geographically and in time.

Post: Of course, Ouray was to judge their show, to select a show. I don't think there was any teaching at Ouray. I'm asked so often to come and judge a show and select a show and to give awards after the show has been selected. Watercolor West I've done twice, which is based in Riverside, California.

Fowler: County fair shows, California state fairs, all those judgings and awards, all over.

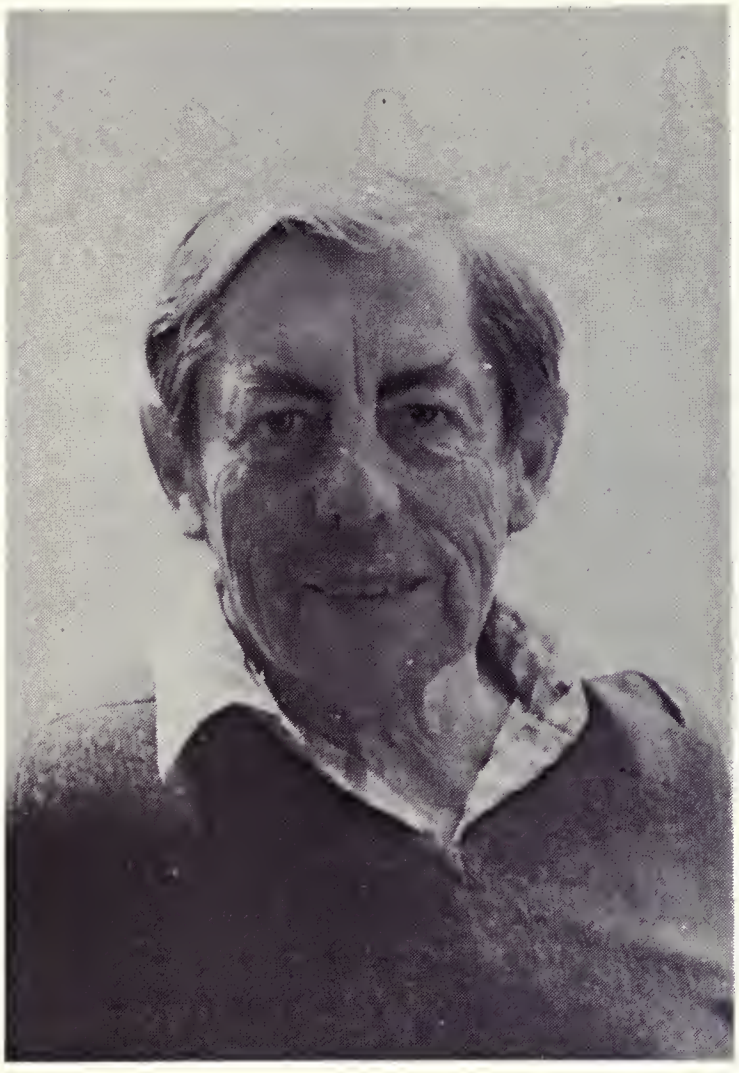
Teiser: So substantially you're doing what you've always done except not regular college teaching?

Post: Yes.

The Best Places

Teiser: I'm going to wind this up by asking you a couple of general questions. Some of them our mutual friend Robert Beck suggested. It was, what places in all the world do you like to paint best?

Post: Well, that's hard to say because I've found out no matter where you go in the world--except maybe the middle of Texas--[laughter] that there isn't something to paint. And interesting and delightful. Of course, I am prone to Italy very much. Italy is such a colorful and beautiful area to paint in. And so is

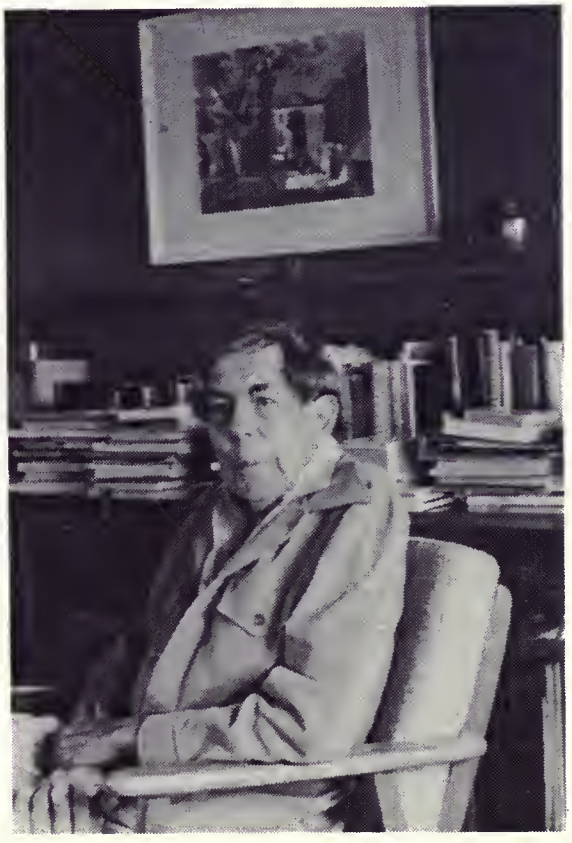


George Post, 1970

Photograph by Catherine Harroun

Below: George Post being interviewed, February 1983

Photograph by Ruth Teiser



Post: France, and Spain is wonderful. The cities of Spain are unusually attractive. And Lisbon, oh, Lisbon and Portugal. What's that little town in Portugal that's so appealing. That I loved so? Nazaré?

Fowler: Yes, Nazaré.

Post: Nazaré is a little fishing village with beautifully colored fishing boats, and the fishermen there still wear their native costume, or they did in 1974.

##

Post: Native costumes are unusual now in Mexico and in Europe. Their native costumes are too expensive, whereas store-bought American clothes are so much easier to come by for the natives who don't have too much money. And if you want those beautiful costumes they used to wear, you pay plenty for them because they're mostly hand-done. They're not machine-made.

Teiser: The last exotic places you were in were Yugoslavia and Greece. Did you enjoy painting there?

Post: Oh, Yugoslavia is just about unbeatable. It's the most beautiful country, and the people are so gracious and accommodating. I heard when I was in Yugoslavia that there was no crime there, hardly any crime.

Greece is another beautiful country.

Teiser: But of all the places in the world, can you bring them down to two or three?

Post: Lake Como was certainly one of my most favorite spots. And Normandy and Brittany in France is another favorite place to paint. And Paris itself is delightful. It's overcrowded. Many tourists. But it's large enough for everyone.

Teiser: That brings up a point. When you are painting in cities like that, is it difficult for you to get a place to work?

Post: Usually these European cities have a river that runs through them, most all of them do, and if you find a spot on the river, around the banks of the river it's not too overcrowded. Don't you think, El?

Fowler: Yes. But in a big city people are not apt to pay much attention. You could stop at the bottom of the Spanish Steps in Rome and just start painting, and nobody pays much attention. George painted from the Spanish Steps. He painted St. Peter's from the Vatican Gardens. You can stop almost anyplace.

Post: And not be crowded. That's true also here in San Francisco. I have a class that meets usually every Friday when I'm in town, and we got all over San Francisco on the city streets, not downtown, but Nob Hill and Russian Hill and outlying districts. And people just go by. A lot of them stop for a second and look, but most of them just pass by without even stopping. So it's true, I think, in most big cities it isn't difficult to paint outdoors, although strangely enough I've never noticed any other classes in San Francisco painting outdoors or in any other city! [laughter]

Fowler: It's easy, but it's not too common!

Teiser: People don't spill all over you anyway. I remember you spoke somewhat graphically of your difficulties in Egypt, in Cairo, but I remember we found you in the Vatican having somehow penetrated the Vatican Gardens, which I believe you weren't supposed to have done at all! [laughing] Nobody apparently threw you out. Do you remember that?

Post: Yes. Yes, I do.

Fowler: Yes. George has a certain innocent facade, just, "Well, I didn't know I wasn't supposed to be there!" [laughing]

Post: Until I'm thrown out, I just stay there.

Teiser: Did they throw you out finally, of the Vatican Gardens?

Post: No.

Teiser: You made a painting.

Fowler: Yes, he did a painting.

Teiser: I have one more question. Now, what sort of things are you looking forward to doing?

PORTSMOUTH SQ.

Post: Well, I'm going to take it easy from now on, and not push myself quite as much as I have been doing through the years. But I don't ever want to stop. I want to just keep doing what I have been doing, but maybe not quite so energetically.

Teiser: So you say!

Fowler: Yes. You should see his schedule for the summer.

Teiser: I believe you <u>think</u> you're going to take it easy.

Post: Maybe that's more like it. I'm just going to go on the way I have been, enjoying it all so much as long as I can!

Transcriber: Joyce Minick
Final Typist: Keiko Sugimoto

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APPENDIX

GEORGE POST

CALIFORNIA PALACE OF THE LEGION OF HONOR
SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA
SEPTEMBER 10 THROUGH OCTOBER 16, 1960

GEORGE POST

George Post's first one-man exhibition at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor was held in the galleries of this museum twenty years ago this winter. A second solo display of his brilliant watercolors was presented here in the summer of 1945. Thus the artist has long since achieved veteran status in the exploitation of his chosen medium, one which he handles with great dexterity and lively imagination. The museum takes keen pleasure in presenting this, the third one-man showing of his work.

Post was born in Oakland in 1906. He attended the Polytechnical High School there and the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. His first one-man exhibition was held at the Beaux Arts Gallery in this city in 1932. This inaugural display marked the beginning of what has been—and continues to be — a career of tireless activity. He has taught at Stanford University, San Jose State College, at the Fine Arts Gallery in San Diego, the Rex Brandt School in Los Angeles, conducted private classes in San Francisco, Seattle and Sacramento, and, since 1947, has been a member of the faculty of the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. Between 1937 and 1946 he traveled extensively in Europe, Canada, Mexico and the United States. Over the past twenty-five years, Post has participated in countless exhibitions throughout the country and has been the recipient of innumerable awards. He is represented in the permanent collections of many American museums and in private collections too numerous to mention.

In addition to works borrowed directly from the artist, the museum is indebted to the following private collectors who have graciously lent to this exhibition: Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Bartholomew; Mr. Robert Beek; Mr. Herb Caen; Mr. John Cluster; Mr. and Mrs. William Coffill; Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Cole; Mr. W. W. Crocker; Mr. Elvin Fowler; Mr. and Mrs. Allen Grant; Mr. William M. Hume; Mr. Paul Kelly; Miss Ethel King; Mr. and Mrs. A. Newark; Dr. Mildred Nichols; Dr. and Mrs. George Richardson; Mrs. Nelson T. Shaw; Mr. Friench Simpson; Mrs. Mason Weymouth; and Miss Frances Wolfenbarger.

T.C.H.

Illustrated on cover: #43 *St. Anne's Church*

Catalogue #44 *Purse Seiner*

CATALOGUE

1. MID-ATLANTIC (1938) 11½" x 17½"
Lent by Miss Frances Wolfenbarger

2. CORVO ISLAND (1938) 11¾" x 17¼"
Lent by Miss Frances Wolfenbarger

3. GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE (1955) 14¾" x 19½"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Cole

4. POINT SUR LIGHT (1942) 17½" x 21½"
Lent by Elvin L. Fowler

5. LIME QUARRY (1954) *Lent by Robert Beck*	14¾″ x 19¾″
6. LITTLE WHARF (1959) *Lent by Friench Simpson*	14¾″ x 17¾″
7. HOOKER CANYON (1956) *Lent by John Cluster*	14½″ x 21¼″
8. LAKE CHAPALA (1946)	15″ x 22″
9. RED MILL AND STREAM (1946)	13″ x 19¾″
10. SANDBLASTING (1952)	14¾″ x 21½″
11. PRINCETON BEACH (1955)	14¾″ x 20″
12. PROWS (1960)	15″ x 18″
13. FAIRWAY (1960)	14¾″ x 17¾″

Catalogue #16 *Contra Costa Barn*

Catalogue #32 *Head Waters, Kern*

14. SAN MATEO FUEL YARD (1959)	15″ x 17¾″
15. PEBBLE BEACH (1958)	14¾″ x 19¾″
16. CONTRA COSTA BARN (1954) *illustrated*	15″ x 18″
17. BASSETT AND MARKET STREETS (1951)	16″ x 22″
18. SAN MATEO HOUSE (1956)	14¾″ x 19¾″
19. HALF MOON BAY (1960)	14¾″ x 20″
20. BAY DREDGE (1955)	18″ x 23¾″
21. BEACHED (1954)	14¾″ x 19¾″
22. PIER 20 (1952) *Lent by Dr. and Mrs. George Richardson*	14½″ x 21¼″
23. CHANNEL (1957) *illustrated* *Lent by Mr. and Mrs. William Coffill*	14½″ x 17¾″
24. FIELDS AT CASPAR (1945) *Lent by Miss Ethel King*	12″ x 18″

25. SONORA STREET CORNER (1954) — 15¾" x 17¾"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Allen Grant

26. COLUMBIA BARN (1949) — 14¼" x 19¼"
Lent by Mrs. Nelson Shaw

27. MORAGA AUTUMN (1948) — 15¼" x 21¾"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. A. Newark

28. PUGET SOUND (1940) — 13" x 17¼"

29. BLUE BOAT (1952) — 14¾" x 17¾"

30. GREEN BARGE (1958) — 14¾" x 17¾"

31. BUBB'S CREEK (1960) — 14" x 19"

32. HEAD WATERS, KERN (1960) *illustrated* — 14½" x 19"

33. UPPER KERN CANYON (1960) — 14½" x 19"

34. BAY GULL (1958) — 41½" x 21¾"

35. WATER TANKS (1960) — 14¾" x 21¾"

36. PRESIDIO (1960) — 14¾" x 21½"

37. SAN MATEO AUTUMN (1959) — 14¾" x 17¾"

38. 13th AND CASTRO (1959) — 14¾" x 18"

39. STREAM (1934) — 21" x 16"

40. 3rd AND ALICE (1949) — 14½" x 19¾"

41. BLUE WAGON (1958) — 14¾" x 17¾"

42. SEINES AT SAUSALITO (1959) — 14½" x 19½"

43. ST. ANNE'S CHURCH (1937) *illustrated* — 22¼" x 17¼"

44. PURSE SEINER (1953) *illustrated* — 18¾" x 24¾"
Lent by W. W. Crocker

45. EMBARCADERO (1954) — 18½" x 24¾"
Lent by W. W. Crocker

46. McCORMICK STREET (1957) — 17½" x 14¾"
Lent by Paul Kelly

47. FRANCISCO STREET (1957) — 14¼" x 21½"
Lent by Paul Kelly

48. PIER 41 (1943) — 14¾" x 21¾"
Lent by William M. Hume

49. BELLS AT TZIN TZAN TZUN (1946) — 14¾" x 21¾"
Lent by William M. Hume

50. STEEL HULLS (1945) — 15¼" x 22"
Lent by Dr. Mildred Nichols

51. SAN JOSE HOUSE (1952) — 21¼" x 14"
Lent by Dr. Mildred Nichols

52. PIGEON POINT (1943) — 15" x 22"
Lent by Mrs. Mason Weymouth

53. GIG HARBOR PIER (1944) *Lent by Mrs. Mason Weymouth*	14¾″ x 21¾″
54. TOP O' THE MARK (1959) *Lent by Herb Caen*	21½″ x 14¾″
55. WHITE HOUSE (1953)	20″ x 15″
56. PERSIMMONS (1949)	21¾″ x 17½″
57. WEEK'S BARN (1948) *Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Bartholomew*	17¼″ x 24¼″
58. HERMOSILLO STREET (1949)	18¾″ x 25¼″
59. COLUMBIA (1948)	18½″ x 24¼″
60. FROM 209 POST STREET (1960) *Lent by Dr. Mildred Nichols*	15″ x 21¾″
61. SOUTH OF MARKET (1937)	14¾″ x 15½″

Catalogue #23 *Channel*

CALIFORNIA PALACE OF THE LEGION OF HONOR

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Year's subscription to Bulletin, $1.50 per year.

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Ruth Teiser

Grew up in Portland, Oregon; came to the Bay Area in 1932 and has lived here ever since. Stanford, B.A., M.A. in English, further graduate work in Western history. Newspaper and magazine writer in San Francisco since 1943, writing on local history and economic and business life of the Bay Area. Book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle since 1943. As correspondent for national and western graphic arts magazines for more than a decade, came to know the printing community.

2033